POUR WINE FOR US

DEAN VAN CLUTE

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A Novel by

DEAN VAN CLUTE

In Collaboration with

WALTON VAN CLUTE

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CHAPTER I

I WAS born at the close of the nineteenth century on a farm which bordered the St. Lawrence River. The fact might be elaborated by the addition of such circumstances as: that four generations of my ancestors were American born; that God only knows how many generations preceded them in Holland, England, Germany, Scotland and the early cradles of eighteenth century Europe; that my mother was attended at the time of my birth by a Dr. Adams who wore a black beard; and that the water for my first bath was heated on the old wood-burning cookstove in the kitchen.

I came into this life at the time that my mother was approaching forty. My father was affecting a walrus mustache and playing bass-horn in the village band. I do not doubt that the period during which the attentions of the family were largely concentrated on me was very short indeed, for I was the fourth child in a family which achieved the fecundity of six children. I was neither wicked nor angelic enough to outshine the rest of them.

"You had," said my mother, "a nice disposition . . . and I don't know when I ever seen such big blue eyes." Which information never particularly startled me because I was very willing to admit the first and frequently annoyed

with reminders of the latter on innumerable occasions after the beginnings of my first self-consciousness. That annoyance must remain my only claim to prophetic vision, for its presence foretold, in those tender years, the appearance and reputation of naïveté which was forever to follow me on account of those eyes which were blue and so uncommonly big; an annoyance, too, which was anything but funny during those periods when one was positive of his own perfect sophistication . . . and others, inexplicably, were not.

My first recollection is of an episode which I can hardly offer as evidence of my good disposition; though the incidents which preceded it, and those which followed soon after, were, past doubt, splendid examples of the justice which a boy of four may render the amenities of social relations. Unfortunate, indeed, it is, then, that I should remember of all things the passion which possessed me that afternoon when my cousin Bessie waved a cookie in front of me which she had just purloined from the kitchen. I seized it and ran and, being a practical person, jammed as much of it as I could into my mouth before she overtook me. And then, at the moment that she repossessed it, I ceased being a defendant and became—most vociferously—a plaintiff who had been abused beyond all that it was human to bear. I pleaded my case with frenzy, vocally, contortionally with my back on the ground and my heels in the air, with shrieks and kicks and all such manner of acting as I deemed would most forcibly convince my mother that I was on the verge of being murdered. But when my mother ran out of the kitchen and took me in her arms I was at a loss to explain either the nature of my torture or the justice of my cause. And thus faced with the new discomfort of embarrassment I straightway told my mother

that Bessie had taken *my* cookie. And with what shame I have always recalled that incident! Enough, anyway, to shake my belief and confound my faith in all the Freudian theories of concealing memory to the contrary.

CHAPTER II

It seemed as though the family had been talking about moving to Potsdam "since time whereof the memory of men runneth not to the contrary." In the winter, when the snow was deep and the pump had frequently to be thawed out with a teakettle full of hot water, Mother had said again and again: "Well, thank the Lord, if we ever live in Potsdam, a person won't have to bundle themselves up as though they were goin' to the North Pole just to get a pail of fresh water!" And she would put on some storm-rubbers, throw a shawl about her and bustle out to the pump with the teakettle and a pail. These incidents were not so frequent, since they occurred only when "the men" were not at the house. And usually before they would leave for the barn or the woods, the house was furnished with all that might be needed until they returned.

My mother would not think of letting me, at seven, struggle with a teakettle full of scalding water and a big iron pump. I could shovel snow, carry in wood, crack nuts, and occasionally throw down hay for the horses, but from all traffickings with scalding water I was forbidden, because my mother had once known of a baby which had been scalded to death by falling into its mother's mop-pail.

It was in the spring that my father spoke most colorfully of moving to Potsdam—when the weather was slow to break and very changeable, and the ground was slushy and muddy under foot, and there was little for him to do except putter around the barns or fuss around the house.

"I'll bet by another year," he would say, "I won't be wasting my time puttering around here with nothing to do, waiting for the weather to break." And then he would bluster about the house like a chicken with its head cut off.

When my oldest brother Mathew would come back for a holiday from Potsdam, where he was attending the Normal School, it seemed as though the whole family spoke of nothing else at the supper-table except moving to Potsdam. It was to be the beginning of wealth, happiness, education, and comfort for all of us—to say nothing of the greater spiritual benefit which would come from being able to attend church more frequently.

Grandfather's was the only dissenting voice. He liked the farm and was satisfied to stay there with occasional visits to Potsdam. "Amos," he would say to my father, "I'd like to know how you calculate to git along in the village with a lot o' yo' ones. You'll find it mighty different, havin' to pay out money for food and wood and tryin' to git along on carpenter's wages, than raisin' most everythin' you need right here. The farm's the only place to raise a family anyway." But Grandfather's words about such matters were not given much consideration by Father. And even at that age my mother had already whispered to me the reason—*Grandfather drank!!* It might have been because of his hard experiences in the Civil War, but that did not quite excuse him. Moreover, Papa had to scold him every once in a while for swearing in front of the children. And it was well known among all of us how "too disgusting" was his habit of chewing tobacco.

But, most of all, Mother wanted to move to Potsdam, because it would mean a better education for the children. She hoped one day that one of us would become a Methodist minister and she had named us all against that

event. Mathew was now sixteen and was finishing his first year at the Potsdam Normal. Mark would be thirteen in the fall and ready to go to high school. These circumstances, together with the facts that Ruth, who had just become ten, had already missed many days at the country school because the weather had been so bad that she couldn't get there; and that I had created in the family a disquieting skepticism concerning the virtues of the country school by coming home one day with the assurance that thunder was not made by God but by the bumping together of clouds—a phenomenon of natural philosophy of which my teacher had that very day told me—made it, indeed, seem necessary that we live in Potsdam.

2

My father was a quick, energetic, and indefatigable man who had, during the years of toil, emerged from the burdens of an ill-equipped and heavily mortgaged farm, and a sizeable and increasing family to support, to that state of restive confidence which strained for more ambitious fields. Having "raised the mortgage" on the farm, improved the place to a condition of excellence which rivaled the best properties in the neighborhood, and sent his oldest son off to Normal School, he was convinced—more or less justly—that he could accomplish greater things if he moved into the village. In his youth he had apprenticed himself as a carpenter and he never tired of telling of the high opinion which his former employer had of his abilities as a craftsman. "Well," he would say, "I think this is a pretty good illustration of what he thought of me. He sent me to take charge of one of his very particular jobs once where there were men working who were twice my age. And he told

me that if I had any complaints to make about any of the men I could either bring them to him or fire them on the spot—just as I chose." His eyes would sparkle with pride and my mother would look at him with that worshipful look which through years of upsets and difficulties she was never quite able to lose. To me, Papa then represented a stern example of almost unattainable virtue. He was one to be respected.

There had been no silver spoons in the life of my father. When he was still a young boy he had to leave school and work on a farm in order to support his mother. His own father had returned from the Civil War, restless, wandering, and undependable—contributing to the family's welfare only during those fickle and sparse intervals between his excursions to Ogdensburg and Montreal in search of vinous adventures. And because of the example of my grandfather, I suppose, my father became unusually serious-minded and responsible. At twenty, in addition to supporting my grandmother, he had saved a little money, learned to play the bass-horn, acquired a certain facility in singing barytone, mastered the ponderous verbosities of the Wesleyan interpretation of the Holy Scriptures, and earned a reputation among the God-fearing people of his native community as a hard-working, splendid young man. But at twenty, too, he had begun to feel the first stirrings of that same restless spirit which animated the peregrinations of my grandfather. He went to Colorado, riding all the way in day-coaches and spending the nights at cheap hotels in order to see the country. In those closing years of the Seventies he settled in Boulder and became a waiter in a hotel dining-room. Before a year was up, and he was to return back home to his native St. Lawrence, he had been promoted to steward and had emerged from the wicked

temptations of the fast life in a western hotel of that period unscathed by alcohol, tobacco, loose women or bad language.

So it was not on account of a strangeness to town life or an ignorance of experience which made my father so eager to get off the farm and to try his luck in the village. He was now forty years old. His years on the farm had been successful. Quite naturally he wanted to be on the move to a domain of greater opportunity. But beyond that natural and expected explanation of his yearning to move to Potsdam there was, I suspect, an even greater urge—that ever-disturbing and stimulating memory of the circumstance that he had once, however temporarily, been the boss over a gang of carpenters in the thrilling enterprise of building a house. And that momentary feeling of importance, of power, of the sense of creation, once tasted, had left him forever after with the pain of an appetite unsated and unforgotten. So now, after all those years since 1893, when he had moved to the farm that he might be sure of food and shelter for his family, he was going back with the unfaltering determination to take up where he had left off this business of building which had so insistently lured him.

3

And thus that fall we moved to Potsdam. The Holland family of seven eager souls emerging from the cradle of its rural beginnings. . . . Father Amos, Mother Etta, Mathew, Mark, Ruth, Peter and John . . . with our formidable Biblical nomenclature, our rigorous Wesleyan discipline, and our two favorite horses, Sally and Frank.

CHAPTER III

I SHALL never be sure that it was due to the imperfections of my critical faculties that I then thought Potsdam to be the most well-favored and lovely town in the whole world. Certainly in that connection at least I shall always be inclined to favor those theorists who maintain that the unstudied criticism of youth is the only judgment that is truly sincere and thus worth a whoop.

Tall elm trees and shady maples, friendly unpaved streets and flagstone sidewalks! Houses with uncrowded yards of lawns and hedges, orchards and gardens surrounding them! Peaceful brownstone churches modestly retiring behind their garments of ivy! The dignified Normal School with its mansard roof and the park of majestic trees which made its campus! Market Street, with its easy-going merchants and modest shop-windows, and its colorful hotel with the balcony on the second story where the band used to play on Saturday nights during the summer! What a crowd of delights and perfections come tumbling through my mind!

To disentangle from these happily mixed threads of my memory that single, delicate strand of my first impressions upon coming into Potsdam! How impossible! It was late, I know, of an autumn evening and I was riding on top of a wagonload of cordwood with my oldest brother. The hours which we had spent in traversing the sixteen miles from the farm had seemed interminable to me. For the load was heavy, and there were plenty of hills, and the

horses had never gone faster than a good walk. So when I first saw the spire of the Catholic church I was overjoyed with the thought that we were at last to get into town and I was to see for the first time the house in which we were going to live. That house about which I had heard so much—with pipes running through it which furnished water without going outdoors, and a thing called a bathtub in which one could almost go swimming.

On the outskirts of the town I saw some boys playing football, and I watched, fascinated by the novelty and fun of the game. I was so excited about everything that I finally had to talk.

"What are they doing?" I asked Mathew.

"Playing football," he said, simply. He had long ago grown rather tired of my unceasing questions.

Nevertheless I had to go on talking.

"Football! Football!" I said under my breath. And then presently exclaimed: "Gee, I would like to play football!"

"Thought you said you wanted to learn to play the trombone," commented Mathew with a tone in his voice which implied that I couldn't do both.

Then, having a problem to solve as to why I couldn't do both, I remained silent for several minutes. Presently the bell in the Catholic church thundered out five heavy strokes. I straightway began to ask more questions. Then suddenly, without a word of warning, my brother turned the horses into the driveway of the grayest-looking house on the street.

We were home!

I know that I was piercingly disappointed over the drabness of the house's exterior—especially after having passed so many bright and good-looking homes on the street along which we had just been riding; but that disappointment

was quickly forgotten in the excitement of actually arriving and seeing the rest of the family in the new surroundings.

I jumped down from the wagon and ran to the kitchen door. And there was my mother, whom I hadn't seen for seven whole hours, taking fresh loaves of bread out of the oven and hustling about the kitchen as though nothing could upset her from her beloved ritual, be it new houses, new towns, the topsy-turviness of moving or whatever else. (And nothing ever could.) I plunged my face into the center of her warm gingham apron and threw my arms about her waist, for she was a familiar sight in this new world of unfamiliar disorder.

The first thing she said was: "How's my darlin'? I'll bet you're hungry." Then she led me over to the sink, showed me how magically one could get hot water just by turning a faucet. "Now wash your hands and I'll give you a nice piece of fresh-baked bread and butter. That'll stay your stomach and won't spoil your supper," she said.

Armed with a piece of bread and butter, I began to explore the house. In the beginning I noticed that the ceilings of the rooms were ever so much higher than those on the farm. Next I discovered the front door, with its vari-colored panes of glass, and for many moments I was fascinated with the changing appearance of the world outside when viewed through the red and the blue and the colorless glass. I decided at length that such a wonderful door partly made up for the lack of both clapboards and paint on the outside of the house.

But the greatest wonder awaited me upstairs. At the end of the hall there was a little room which contained a huge, long, painted tub with faucets. I tried them with great excitement. Finally I came to a bowl with a seat on it.

Its rustic equivalent had possessed enough similarity to make me suspect its purpose. A long chain with a handle on it dangled temptingly in front of me. I seized it and gave a pull. Immediately there was a loud, strange, and frightening noise. I fled in terror, still clutching my piece of bread, downstairs into the kitchen.

"There's a flood! There's a flood!" I tried to explain. My brother Mathew dashed back up the stairs with me to investigate. To my great surprise, the thing was again as quiet and calm as I had first seen it. My brother laughed uproariously, pulled the chain again and demonstrated the working of my first water-closet. Thus occurred the birth of a growing and affected nonchalance to all the mechanical wonders of civilization which I was ever after to encounter.

Downstairs again, I peered out the front windows overlooking the street. Directly opposite was a large white house with a big screened porch on the side and a smooth driveway running down the edge of its well-kept lawn. Along the driveway there was a boy about my size riding a strange-looking machine which I learned later was called a tricycle. I compared the appearance of the boy with myself: I with my well-worn overalls and faded shirt and he with his dark-blue suit and polished shoes. I was immoderately impressed with his ease in riding back and forth on the tricycle. I began to feel envious and uncomfortable. I didn't realize then that this boy had never ridden on a horse's back, nor managed a hay-rake all alone, as I had. I could only think of how superior he must feel with his fine suit and his ability to ride a tricycle.

Unwilling to face the discomfort of that comparison any longer, I turned away from the window and decided

that I would go out to the barn. Once out the back door, everything seemed much better. There was a big orchard in the back yard and the trees were loaded with apples. The barn was new and very nice-looking. I walked into it proudly and gazed with satisfaction at the fine-looking horses that had brought us all the way from the farm. I thrilled with pride when I peeked under a huge tarpaulin in the carriage-house and saw a brand-new buggy which my father had just purchased.

But still I had to ask my mother why our house didn't look like the others.

"Well, now, darlin'," she said, "if you're not too impatient, it *will* look like the others." She added with a determined smile, "And I wouldn't be at all surprised if it looked a plagued sight better one of these days."

2

That night we ate supper in the kitchen, because the dining-room things were not unpacked. There were seven of us crowded around the fall-leaf table: Papa, Mama, Mathew, Mark, Ruth, John and I. After Papa had said grace very impressively, as befitted our first meal in the new house, we all ate hungrily and talked with excitement. There were endless comparisons of the new life which was hardly a day old, with that which we had been accustomed to for seven years on the farm.

It was astonishing—the difference and wonder of everything. Fancy-looking carriages were passing by on the street; lights were appearing in the neighbors' windows; people were walking by even after dark, with the bright street-light down at the corner shining so brilliantly. It

was all so fascinating that I didn't want to go to bed. But Mama kept saying: "Come now, darlin', you're all tired out. And there'll be another day tomorrow."

It was a long time after the light was blown out before I could get to sleep.

Oh, first and golden September of the twentieth century, where has the magic of your transient days forever fled!

CHAPTER IV

On the Sunday following our arrival in Potsdam we all went to church: an imposing procession with Ruth and me in front, Mathew and Mark following, and Father and Mother with three-year-old Johnny hanging onto their hands.

Our arrival was, of course, the signal for curious glances, surreptitious smiles and approving nods from the more Christian members of the congregation. But when I turned around on going into the pew and saw my father again standing so straight and stiff in his Sunday clothes, white tie, and tall collar, I felt less embarrassed at the big auditorium and the large crowd of people looking at us. He was so important-looking.

Presently, after the first excitement, I began to realize that the one thing that did most to impress me of the size, the grandeur and the wonder of the place was the sonorous, majestic music from the pipe-organ! I had never before heard anything larger than the gaudily carved and decorated harmonium in the country church. This instrument seemed so huge and all-powerful, so magnificently noisy that it appeared in its harsher moments to be a good representation of the voice of God. I liked it; it made church service a little more capable of being borne. In those days anything which could do that was a welcome boon, for I had at that time come to look upon church services as the punishment and penance for my sins during the previous week. It seemed to me that when anything took

place which might possibly mitigate the maddening tediousness and torturing confinement of those services, the occasion was a trustworthy sign that God had relaxed a moment from his forbidding severity and was actually getting to be a little bit jolly and kind.

I had to blunder along believing that "Our Father, Who art in Heaven" was, after all, just a super and omnipotent edition from which my own father was derived—austere, anthropomorphic, terribly just and exacting. The fact that He had such inscrutable sermons and prayers said in His name and demanded such painful restrictions of one's activities on Sundays, and that He had such a big, dull, black-covered book written about Him, were characteristics comparable to my father's insistences that I get up so early in the morning, that I should not wade in mud puddles with my shoes and stockings on, that I work around the house when I wanted to go out and play, and that I should sit up so straight and eat so deliberately at the table. I always wanted to curry favor with both of them, but my efforts were seldom successful, due perhaps to the circumstance that those very, very good deeds which I so ostentatiously performed were so often succeeded by violations of Good Behavior. That is, if by an extra errand or some self-denial I happened to come to the end of the week with a penny which I had not spent, I would occasionally and with much to-do put it in the Sunday School collection together with the one which my father customarily gave me for that purpose. Certainly the Lord knew about it because He, I knew, saw everything which I did or thought. As for my father, there was no doubt about his knowledge of the Christianly sacrifice. I took great pains to see to that.

But what happened? If that very afternoon I was caught playing baseball in a field distant enough, I thought, from the house to escape the attention of my father, it seemed to matter to him not at all that I should have performed such an unselfish and virtuous act that very morning; nor did my silent prayers to the Lord on the way home have the slightest apparent effect. For, despite all, upon reaching home I was inevitably led out to the barn and there made to feel both the wrath of God and my father by free applications of that corrective which my grandfather used to call—so poetically—"beech-oil." (Beech-oil was a general term applied to whippings by beech-switches, maple-switches, horsewhips, or convenient straps.)

The misery of such occasions was transient, especially if it happened that the same evening after church service—as it often did—some of the Normal School girls who boarded with us would come down into the parlor to play the piano and sing. For Marian Cleve was among them—a dark-haired, contralto-voiced creature who seemed to me then to be very sympathetic and angelic. She would whisper to me with her low, soft voice that she was very sorry to hear that I had got a whipping. And when my father's back was turned and he was tremendously preoccupied with singing bass to the shrieking trebles, she would wink at me a little, and give me a quick little hug. Her gesture did more than a little to convince me at a tender age that if young men were to receive indulgences or dispensations from any of the Heavenly Hosts such dispensations must come without question from those angelic members thereof who "did up" their hair and spoke with contralto voices.

2

Indeed, there were other compensations to the harsher aspects of my religious and spiritual tutelage. In those days there were no movies, and to the Town-Hall-and-Opera-House, there came very few plays. I was allowed to attend fewer still. Moreover, there was no social life to speak of except that which centered around the church. So it was both necessary and inevitable that the more frivolous features of such social life as I did have should come under its guardianship. There were monthly suppers and holiday parties, church bazaars and magnificent Christmas celebrations, Junior League meetings and Easter entertainments.

I remember most vividly those glorious Christmas celebrations. For weeks before Christmas I would go to the church basement with my sister Ruth on several afternoons a week. We went to rehearse my part in a Christmas play or pageant, help with decorations, make ornaments for the Christmas tree, but always to play around and have a good time. If one were late or even absent due to the momentarily more important engagements of a snowball fight or a hockey game, there were no dire punishments. The girls might try to tease one, but even that was not an altogether unpleasant experience. It was always so wonderful on those cold afternoons when the snow was already two feet deep, and more was falling, to go into the warm and lighted basement of the church, and be there in the midst of the phantasmagoria of laughter, talking, young people rehearsing, and the general industry of "getting ready for Christmas." It was good to have an audience before which one could boast of one's most recent achievements of skill and bravery on the skating rink or atop the enemies' snowball fort, and to see the girls with their braids of hair undone,

dressed like fairies, angels or children of long ago. Then too, if I were sly enough, I could steal most thrilling glimpses of that ever-mysterious region of guarded whiteness and pink bare skin which on more formal occasions the girls concealed so carefully. One always had the excellent pretext of asking a particular girl to come away into some corner alone with him so that he might practice his lines with her as a prompter. When the details of that particular subterfuge were disposed of, there was of course no good reason why she should not remain there with him for a while talking about very private little things, feeling very excited and funny about it. . . .

Yes, the church had compensations for the harsher aspects of its religious and spiritual guidance. For around Christmas time even the Bible stories seemed to become interesting and colorful. Oh, stars of the East and Bethlehem mangers and Christmas carols and Peace on Earth, Good Will to Men! What beautiful, incomparable romance! My heart was gayer than usual. The very snowflakes were full of excitement. Chimneys and fireplaces became objects of affection. I was full of good deeds! Ah, those gorgeous illusions of youth and Yuletide!

On Christmas Eve there are oysters for supper! The smell of balsam boughs, candy-making, cookie-baking and freshly popped popcorn permeates the house. There is an air of magic and mystery in every surreptitious wink and whispered conversation. Strange excursions are made to bedrooms, where doors are locked, and paper rattles cautiously. There have been last-minute trips to Weston's store, with its frosty windows only partially hiding the fascinating array of glistening skates, of silvery horns, and bright-colored games, its counters loaded with steam-engines and crocinole sets, rocking-horses and drums, its walls lined

with wonderful red sleds and magnificent toboggans. The sleigh-bells ring with a merrier jingle; the gay snow crystals sparkle with midnight brilliance; cutters whizz by on the jolly excursions to church entertainments and home celebrations. The very frost of the air tingles with excitement.

Later, on the cruel road of truths and disillusionment—that forbidding path of categories and ruthless dialectics—I learned, of course, how transient and trivial were the tangible circumstances of those glorious flights of imagination. But I can never forget the romance of those passages. They have remained the permanent and significant superstructure of a foundation of flim-flams! The unrealities have turned out to be the only realities! From a perversion misnamed "religion" the dross of stupidity and dogma has found its place, and the pure gold of fancies remains. Those pregnant evidences of a will to see things as they ought to be, rather than as they are, have triumphed, as art survives the hands which make it.

3

But it must not be supposed that I was very imaginative, or reflective, or given to any but the most ordinary mental activities in my youth. Then indeed my life was made up of action and physical sensation. If precocity visited me at all it spoke only to my body and let my brain go hang. At twelve my body had grown so rapidly, and had thus outdistanced all but the clumsier forms of coordination, that it earned for me the name of "big lummox." I was generally most useful in all those forms of activity which required size and strength.

In the Junior League of our church there were about nine boys who ranged in age from twelve to fourteen.

And during the winter we made up a formidable hockey team, with substitutes, manager and all. By "Hobson's choice" I was goal-keeper. And in that position in those days both power and magnitude were an asset, for many of the assaults upon the goal were made in the manner of football "rushes" and a goal-keeper was really the last line of defense.

The captain of our team was Johnny Frobisher, my closest companion and nearest neighbor. Years later he became one of Dartmouth's greatest athletes and has never got over it. There was a large vacant lot beside his house which when flooded in winter became an excellent skating rink. We practised there, played our games, compared hockey sticks and showed off before the girls. Sometimes we ventured down to the river and skated there with the much older fellows from the Normal School and the Clarkson "Tech". When they played we would watch their hockey games closely, trying to learn all the fine points of passing and carrying the puck through opponents' most desperate defense. All this interest bore fruit. Johnny learned to play center exceptionally well and acquired that deft little whip to his hockey stick which gained us many a goal. While I won a reputation as goal-keeper which made me content with the job.

When spring came around we had a baseball team. We called ourselves the "Nine Young Athletes". Though there was only one other team in town which we could play, we were greatly concerned with regular practise, identical uniforms, and official scoring. The other team was made up of Catholic boys, and the rivalry between us was always intense. I became the pitcher, my lanky strength giving me ability to throw a faster ball than any of the others. Speed at that age was the thing that counted. As I remem-

ber, we won most of our games. That same kind memory reminds me that on the occasions we lost we were usually without some of our best players, who had been called to the painful tasks of beating carpets, sawing wood, or running on eternally long errands.

On some of those occasions, indeed, I was myself called; my horrible task being to reduce the mounting piles of wood behind our house into lengths to fit the kitchen stove. It was at the instance of my first call that I deserted my job in order to pitch the last two innings of an all-important game. I received very generous applications of the painful "beech-oil" that evening after supper. I considered that my father should have given me half-a-whipping because I had, after all, done half of my work. And because he was deaf to my pleas in that direction, my sense of the injustice made me determine a revenge.

4

It was my job to go out to the barn after supper to throw some bedding under the horses. I saw my opportunity. The evening after the whipping I did my chore as usual, but before I left the barn I loosened the halter-shank of my father's favorite bay mare, Sally, and unhooked the rear door of the stable. Several times on the short path back to the house I was on the verge of returning to repair my wickedness, but the very painful recollections of that whipping restrained me. At length I got back to the kitchen trembling with excitement, and a fearful sense of sin. Desperately I tried all evening to forget my deed, but the harder I struggled, the more insistently it tortured me. In bed I tossed in hectic alternations of defiance and remorse.

The next morning was Sunday. I stayed in bed as long

as possible, worn out from the agony of the night's unrest, listening, listening for my brother Mathew's steps as he returned from the barn. At last the commotion downstairs announced the terrible discovery. Sally had been stolen! Or had run away!! I buried my head under the covers and shivered. Finally, not being able to stand it any longer, I got up with feverish resolve and went to the bathroom. I was splashing cold water on my face in preparation for facing Papa and telling him the truth, when Mathew came in crying the "news."

"Was the stable door hooked when you bedded the horses last night?" he asked.

I feigned the utmost surprise and consternation. "Why, as far as I remember," I stammered, "it was closed and hooked. . . . I'm almost sure it was . . . in fact, I'd almost bet anything that it was. . . ."

"It's mighty funny," he said, and he turned around to go downstairs. I followed him with the towel in my hands. I encountered my father in the kitchen with the display of utmost innocence. Five minutes before, I had boldly decided to tell him the truth and face the worst whipping that I had ever had in my life. But having unexpectedly told Mathew a lie, I now unaccountably decided to stick to it.

My father did not suspect me. No doubt throughout that day, upon the few occasions that he noticed me, he interpreted my tortured face as an indication of how bad I felt that Sally had run away. Early that forenoon instead of going to church he hitched up the other horse and drove around the country looking for Sally. Meanwhile the fear that the mare would never be found was added to the misery of my remorse. For days I suffered my first great wretchedness. When Sally was found on a farm some six

miles out of Potsdam I knew my first relief. But for many months the consciousness of my deed returned to torture me. After many years it came back frequently to remind me that the worst act of my youth—at least according to any of the successive codes of ethics which I have ever embraced—had gone unpunished by my father, who was always so meticulous and rigid in his adherence to the caveat of Solomon. This was the only occasion, however, that I can remember that my father ever missed punishing me for any infraction of his very severe code. Yet throughout all these years there is no remorse or punishment that stands more vividly painful in my mind than that which my conscience inflicted upon me at the time.

CHAPTER V

WHILE during all those pleasant years between seven and fourteen I was predominantly a creature of action and feeling (as I continued to be for another seven years thereafter) there must have been some slight increment to my mental development. Only the evidence of academic milestones show it. From second grade to the first year of high school one does learn the fundamental operations of arithmetic, to say nothing of the discovery of America and the difference between a strait and a peninsula.

But from that period there come to me now only a few vivid memories of any mental ferment, and one has to do with economic values. When my father arrived in Potsdam he was, to my mind, a man derived from God and quite capable of doing anything as long as he deemed it righteous. His confidence in his ability and righteousness had never been questioned by me. But during those first two winters in Potsdam his employment as a carpenter was quite sporadic, a circumstance which aroused enough feeling of alarm in my mother so that she could not conceal her fear from me. Thus there was born in me that first vague uncertainty concerning the security of life! I know that my mother had an almost blind confidence in my father. But I now realize also that she always had an acute and painful sense of the precariousness of any situation, whether it was the danger of our going out in the snow without our overshoes on or the chance which my father took in moving his family from the safety of the farm to

the uncertainties of life in Potsdam. It was due to the unfortunate acuteness of that sense of hers that I experienced my first vague acquaintance with that hideous monster, "Economic Insecurity," which like a hound of hell has dogged me ever since, in my most elevated enthusiasms and melancholy apathies, in moments of ecstasy, and in hours of horrible pain. Doubtless it has mixed benefit with its curse, as all the trials of man must do. Still nowhere on my journey towards urbanity have I been able to view it with any more affability than I must always feel towards cruelty or greed.

So during those pleasant years between seven and fourteen there was certainly one mental ferment, however bitter the wine it produced.

2

As springtime of the second year came around a cornucopia of good news and startling prospects was emptied into our midst. Excitement pervaded the household.

For weeks my father had been bringing home long rolls of blueprints which, after supper, he spread upon the dining-room table and pored over until long after I had gone to bed. When he had first brought them home and opened them so enthusiastically, I had asked him what they were. Being told that they were plans for the new Methodist church my interest in them had ceased, for I had heard so much both at Sunday School and at home about "the new Methodist church," and the seemingly endless activity in raising money for it, that I long ago had grown quite indifferent to anything concerning it.

One night there was a most extraordinarily eager glow on my father's face as he came home from work and strode

into the kitchen. Indeed, there was an aura of elation about him that was inescapably contagious.

"Well, Mama," he said triumphantly, "I wouldn't be at all surprised if your husband built the M. E. Church."

My mother stared at him for a moment with an expression of awe and incredibility.

"My soul a' body, Amos!" she finally exclaimed. "You don't mean it!"

"That's just what I do mean!" exulted my father. And he grabbed her around the waist and began a most un-Methodist-like dance around the kitchen.

My mother shrieked, "Amos! Amos! Good land o' livin'! What *are* you doin'! . . . You'll have me on the floor in a minute if you don't look out!" She scolded him with a smile on her face that would have melted even the heart of a successful banker.

I remember that one of my strongest impressions then was of the unwonted and undignified behavior of my father. It seemed to me that he was violating the very foundations of his character, his austere God-like perfection, by thus revealing such human traits. The emotion of joy over anything except doing God's duty seemed to place him farther down toward my level of sinfulness; and though it faintly suggested that someday I might like him, it also decreased my respect. Later as I came to see more of these human traits of his, so incorrigible had been my early impression of him as a harsh agent of divinity who could not be deeply affected by the joys and sorrows of the world of flesh, that each such display, which would have been lovable and hoped-for in any one else, appeared obscene or ridiculous in him, an evidence of degeneration.

Indeed, so incurable was the taint of that childhood impression that when I began to learn the fundamentals of

sex and to place two and two together and thus realize how I happened to be born, I could not help viewing him with disgust. Sex, I had learned, was the original, most shameful sin. My father, who had always stood before me as being without sin, had indulged in it! How horrible! How much more terrible I, sinful enough in my own right, must be, having such a father! Against that thought I would weigh such facts as: that he did not smoke or drink or use the name of the Lord in vain; that he attended church regularly and made many efforts to bring other people to God.

Later, however, when I made the discovery that sex, properly restrained and sanctified by marriage in the church, was not only righteous but a thing entirely—though inexplicably—different from all other manifestations of it, I felt less badly. But it took many years to completely eliminate that particular disgust for my father.

So it was that my father's dancing around the kitchen with my mother made me feel embarrassed for him, although I laughed, and although the import of the news which he brought was of such an exciting nature, even to my unsophisticated youth, that it might normally have been expected to command my mental attention to the exclusion of everything else. For however indifferent I had become to the recurring conversations, campaigns, and promises concerning the proposed "New Methodist Church," that very indifference was but an indication of the tremendous and even vital importance of the project of building it—just as one's usual indifference to the roof over one's head, the air one breathes or the ideals one cherishes is a form of acknowledgment of their critical consequence.

That good news which foretold the building of the new Methodist church by my father should be set down as among the memorabilia of those days in Potsdam. My father, having come to the town simply as a farmer who had acquired a little knowledge of carpentry at some vague period during his past, had studied the plans (which had been made by a New York architect), figured on them, submitted his figures, and had been awarded the contract. It later developed that though most of the men on the building committee had called him "a farmer who knows nothing about superintending the erection of a fifty-thousand-dollar marble church," they were influenced to give him the contract: first, because the architect had said that his bid showed more knowledge of the distributed costs of the project; second, because his figure was the lowest; and third, because he was a member of the church.

Early that summer the old church was torn down. For weeks it was a fascinating sight to watch. When part of the steeple was removed, the big heavy bell, which I had been told weighed several tons, was revealed. I could not imagine how it could possibly be lowered to the ground. But one afternoon, when I had gone down to the job to take my father a pail of lemonade (which my mother was still very fond of making for him on hot days as she had done on the farm during the weeks of haying and harvesting) I encountered a large crowd of curious observers who, apparently as interested as I was in the problem of getting the bell down, stood there staring at the visible solution of that problem. As the makeshift crane which my father had devised gently lowered that heavy mass of iron to the ground, I felt suddenly born in me a new pride in my father which was so unprecedentedly mov-

ing and wonderful that I wanted to rush up and throw my arms around him and talk to him as I would to one of my closest friends.

Shortly after Father had begun work on the church he decided to make those improvements to our house, whose absence had so long made it shabby and conspicuous as well as an uncomfortable reminder to me that perhaps our family wasn't as well-off, or as clever, or as nice, as our neighbors. That summer my oldest brother, Mathew, with the help of a carpenter, clapboarded the house, built a large piazza across the front and down one side, painted the entire exterior of the house white with a green border, and laid hardwood floors. During the evenings, later on in the season, my father built an elaborate cherry grill between the parlor and the living-room and put up a new set of hardwood stairs in the reception hall.

When all the work was completed it seemed to me that there was no other house in Potsdam quite so fine. Many years later when I returned and saw that house again I suffered one of those great shocks which attend one's constant state of bewilderment as they return to familiar scenes in quest of their youth. That ill-proportioned, gingerbready house of the very early twentieth century! Yet what a fairyland palace in my youth!

Even in the little community of Potsdam, which was far less ruthless than the rest of the world in gaging the worth and importance of a person by the glitter and value of their material possessions, that new house did a great deal to relieve my first pangs of inequality and inferiority. One day in the charity wards of City Hospital I had unending hours and ceaseless provocations for thinking over and over again of the unequal distribution of material benefits. The creatures around me, who must depend upon

charity for the meager sustenance which kept them alive, challenged by their contrast a yacht club of millionaires just across the river from our hospital. I asked myself if it were not certain insidious and inescapable environmental influences of our youth which induce us to feel that we are somehow better than some one else if we own more than they do. Because I had felt years before that I was a much better person when my father had contrived to make our house finer than any I had ever lived in before, I had become inoculated with that pride which is the virus of all vicious strife, all tyranny, all wars.

Now that the house was finished and we were all so proud of it, my mother decided that Ruth and I could have a Hallowe'en party. We had never had a party before, and it seemed that the new house not only made such an affair plausible, but made it necessary. If one has just acquired something that is far more handsome than anything he has ever had before, most of the pleasure to be derived from it is from showing it off to his friends—for both their admiration and their envy.

By that third fall in Potsdam my sister and I had become acquainted with several boys and girls who did not belong to the Methodist church. In many cases the very freshness of their acquaintance—the intriguing lure which envelops people about whose lives we know so much less than we do of our close friends—made us eager to become more familiar with them. So we invited a great many of them to our party.

There was a considerable debate with Mama and Papa about Mary Crowley, Ruth's friend, because she was a Catholic. But she came. Mama and Papa were especially careful to be nice to her and to show her all of the very finest Christian virtues that were in the catalog of polite-

ness. She, with her warm Irish talent for making every one love her, and her copper hair and blue eyes, became the very flame of the festivity around which the rest of us glowed with a reflected warmth.

The enchantment of that party lasted for weeks, for it was at least during that length of time that Marian Premier spoke to me and treated me with an air of an intimate understanding when our eyes or our occupations brought us together in the fourth grade classroom of No. 8 School. And I was certain that my older brothers must feel very pleased with me for having attained to such familiar relations with a proud girl whose father was one of the wealthiest merchants in the town. Therefore I was particularly chagrined and resentful when one day, after a rough and heated session of football in the schoolyard, sitting down close to her to help her with some arithmetic, she said, "I hate boys who don't keep their hands clean and their hair combed!" It seemed to me that she implied that any boy who was as haughty as she was could play football without soiling his hands or mussing his hair. The implication wounded me so deeply that I could not even reply; but in order to conceal my feelings, I did my utmost to pay no attention to her words, finishing the example which I was doing for her and shamefacedly excusing myself by saying that I had to study my spelling lesson.

That characteristic in me as it grew and manifested itself more widely gained for me the alternate aspersion of cowardice or a soft-hearted disposition. Later, upon analysis, it seemed to me to be mainly an unpopular form of vindictiveness in a world which defines courage as an eagerness to be pugnacious about any affront or criticism. In childish accord with the environment of which I was a

part, I began to feel I was a coward and, after similar displays so lacking in boldness, would determine that on the next occasion I would have a ready retort of such a scathing nature as to stamp me for all time as a creature with extraordinary courage. But when those next occasions arrived my real nature was as unprovoked to daring demonstrations of violence either in speech or action as any normal person's life is uninfluenced by New Year's resolutions. Because of this continued failure upon my part to develop that cocky quality which I classified as courage, my vindictive impulse inevitably sought an outlet in other directions.

I tried to make it as obvious as possible to Marian Premier that I was not so ill received by other girls, despite my dirty hands, and I strove to show the school bullies, Puggy Hawkins and Elmer Burns, that although it was not easy to pick a fight with me, it was more difficult to hit one of my pitches in baseball, and just as hard to get a hockey puck through my goal.

In all of us common mortals there is desire to vindicate ourselves in one way or another. We yearn to make our ideas of life prevail. If one person with an inborn distaste for angry assault—whether it goes under the name of timidity or soft-heartedness—seeks by skill and ridicule, by gentleness, by tolerance or by the dramatization of his own example to allure his envious acquaintances or impartial critics into an acceptance of his opinions, he is bound to rationalize his method; just as my own mind was inevitably driven into that (then unnamed) process when Marian wounded my feelings in that fourth grade classroom and I did not retaliate in the conventional manner of a boy nine years old.

3

It may have been that the excitement and the tangible, physical pleasures of Thanksgiving, following so soon after my first Hallowe'en party and the end of my first romance, did much to mitigate my yearning for a renewal of that slight but precious relationship with Marian. In any event appetite, for that day at least, triumphed over tender passion. Life somehow went on.

That Thanksgiving was an event that might well have made any of the Holland family forget everything except its own good fortune, and the abundant blessings of the Lord. From precarious existence of its first two years in Potsdam, it had suddenly been transported into a life of material prosperity which seemed to border upon opulence. The improvements on the house and its new furnishings were still a fresh source of pride and well-being. Old friends and relations could now be entertained with the lavishness of middle-class Methodism. Mathew had been made leader of the Normal School orchestra. Papa had been asked to organize an orchestra in the Sunday School.

Mama had been cooking for days and Ruth had made several pounds of homemade candy. There were twenty-two people for Thanksgiving dinner. The immense table was set in the grandest fashion, with silver standing upright in the grotesque manner of Indian tepees, napkins elegantly curled in the water glasses, jams and jellies in innumerable glass dishes whose endless variety of bizarre patterns were a sight to behold, and bowls of oranges which, even in opulence, were a Saturday night luxury. Last, but by no means least, came the turkey, with its lesser accompaniments of a goose, several chickens and a huge roast of pork! The unaccustomed splendor of the

Holland family! It was like Dick Whittington being made Lord Mayor of London . . . like the woodsman's son suddenly discovering that he was a prince! Papa stood at the end of the long table beaming triumphantly. Then there was a sudden silence and his face became passionately serious. His head bowed—into the impressive hush his bass voice entered reverently. "Father," he said, "will you say grace." And then that even more eloquent bass of my grandfather began its sonorous supplication, "Almighty God, Father of all blessings, Giver of all gifts, we thank Thee. We thank Thee for the gift of life which once again allows us to gather together in thanksgiving for Thy glorious bounty. We humbly thank Thee for Thy constant grace and for the unnumbered material benefits that Thou hast seen fit to heap upon us. And wilt Thou now bless us once more in our Thanksgiving. Bless this food to our use and our lives to Thy service, in Christ's name we ask it. Amen."

There is a timid, uncertain raising of heads, a gradual break in the reverent hiatus and then a deluge of laughter and exclamations, gayety and compliments.

Indeed, so great was the abundance, so loud were the thanks, so magnificent the festivity of that Thanksgiving, that in the spirit of it all there was a suggestion of exaggeration; as though, underneath, this unaccustomed grandeur betrayed the uncertainty of such benefits—the precarious nature of wealth. To a farmer a year of prosperity is no guarantee that it is to be followed by another, yet he answers the fickle bountifulness of Nature with a corresponding lavishness; and we of the Holland family were essentially farmers.

As unregardful as most farmers are of the future, my father was even more so. When he had money he never

thought about the future except in the most optimistic way. In all his life, whenever good fortune smiled upon him he never for one moment thought that it would cease doing so. It may have been a sincere faith in the assurance that "The Lord will provide." I think that the fundamental cause of his optimism was even deeper. I am sure that he never ceased having faith in himself. He never became resigned to the capriciousness of life. He was always confident that some day he would overcome all its economic uncertainties. At least he never admitted a doubt. He was a consummate bluffer, but one got the impression that he believed in his bluffs. Yet on account of his abnormal faith in himself he distrusted others to an extraordinary degree.

The whole curious process came to him naturally from the inane tenets of his religion. A religion that holds man to be born in sin and naturally evil, that considers most all of the spontaneous pleasures of life to be worldly and wicked, that demands of him that he believe that these, and other equally bizarre falsehoods, are the divine truth in the face of all evidence to the contrary, cannot, of course, avoid developing in its followers the most fantastic notions as to what is real and what is false. It must encourage in them the most exaggerated hypocrisy.

My father's lack of any precautions concerning the future was based not so much upon a sunny optimism as it was upon the grim confidence that he and the Methodist Church could not be wrong.

His life was peculiar in the additional respect that it contained no very, very close companions. No men except relatives ever came to the house to be entertained, or to spend the evening in friendly conversation. He never seemed to possess any genuine affection for any of the men whom he knew. And yet . . . long before I had ever

delved into the illuminating pseudo-science of psychology I had seen a twinkle in my father's eye as he surreptitiously scanned the trim figure of a pretty woman. I had observed his guarded grins whenever he listened to certain accounts of my grandfather's rakish and libidinous adventures. And I had noticed the expression of satisfaction that came over his face whenever he took the medicinal—and alcoholic —Peruna. From these and many other observations I had evolved the faint and querulous speculation that perhaps his austerity and impossible righteousness were maintained at the expense of a violent and constant struggle with his better nature.

4

At that memorable Thanksgiving dinner my grandfather got into a discussion of religion with my father. Such a circumstance was not, of course, unusual. It always seemed inevitable that my father should get into religious discussions on all more or less formal occasions, especially when there were a lot of people in to dinner. It was the one subject which, once begun, never seemed to end, which grew more interesting and heated as it went on despite the pleading protestations of my mother. Father could be more prepossessed and intractable about it than in any other debate because he could more plausibly and gracefully reduce all issues to quotations from the Bible, from which infallible position there could be no appeal by any sane controversialist.

Grandfather, however, was not sane, by the standards of Methodist alienists. When he talked about religion his words were always inclined to crackle with humor. "What I'd like to know," said my grandfather, "is—if God made

the world, who made God?" Papa, irritated, smiled with Christian tolerance. "'Before time was, I am,'" he said simply. "That's very easy for anyone who wants to understand it," he went on to explain. ". . . God has always existed." But though Father was convinced of the infallibility of his explanations he nevertheless seemed unwontedly irritated and uncomfortable with Grandfather. Nothing that he could ever find to say could quite cancel the plausibility of Grandfather's skepticism. It was so disturbingly concerned with common sense and so annoyingly sacrilegious!

Grandfather was "evil" in such a variety of ways. Following his return from the Civil War he had never been able to settle down on the farm again and support his family, but had gone from one adventure to another until the time arrived when the Government gave him a pension. From that auspicious moment he became a frank and settled gentleman of leisure, condescending to work only on such occasions as he felt spontaneously impelled "to do something." He made axe-helves, did blacksmithing, or put in a garden, but never worked from any sense of duty. This dereliction, together with his other excursions from Wesleyan morals—drinking, smoking, swearing, and adultery—was, of course, *prima facie* evidence with my father that whatever he said about religion was, at the very outset, born of corruption.

The depth of Grandfather's corruption seemed to measure for my older brothers—and certainly for me—the greater part of his interest and charm; for, devil though he must be, he was an entertaining devil. Tall, slim, straight as an arrow, with his Vandyke beard and high forehead, he had the bearing of a cavalier and the sardonic tongue of a disbeliever. With his alternating moods of

gruff asperity and jolly facetiousness he could inspire both love and respect. There were moments when I considered that to approach him any closer than a radius of ten feet would be to violate his dignity and solitude unpardonably. There were others when I sat on his lap as he showed me how to whittle expertly with my jack-knife, or wriggled in his arms while he tickled me with the tip of his beard. He taught me how to make my first bow and arrows and thus enabled me to outshoot any of the rest of the boys in the neighborhood, both in distance and accuracy. Sometimes on Sunday afternoons he would take me with him on his walks in the woods hunting and gathering suitable branches of briar and thorn-apple trees for canes—so unusual and pleasant a diversion on a Sabbath for me that my eagerness to have it repeated aroused my father's suspicions and resulted in a denial of that privilege, which encouraged Grandfather to quote Bob Ingersoll a little more frequently and bombastically than usual, and to send me to the store more often for his plugs of chewing tobacco.

Although I was inclined to accept at that time Papa's interpretation of such actions as a malicious spite on the part of Grandfather, I later came to realize that such an attitude sprang from the generous desire of Grandfather to show me the converse of ecclesiastical restraint. And the enjoyment he derived no doubt was precisely the same as that which accrued to Socrates from "corrupting" the youth of Athens.

My exposure to Grandfather's philosophy and my pleasure in his indulgence was tempered with distrust—a distrust which always accompanies the gradual acquisition of any knowledge which violates a code already held, no matter how unpleasant that code may be.

As my grandfather discussed religion with Papa, at

that memorable Thanksgiving dinner, and as my older brothers showed an inclination to support his disbeliefs, I could not decide whether I wanted those disbeliefs to triumph over my father's religion or whether I desired that my father should annihilate all of them with one sweeping, infallible quotation from the Bible which would settle the discussion for all time in favor of religion. All of us hesitate on the threshold of a new truth, hoping that somehow we may enjoy it surreptitiously without the necessity of its supplanting a pre-conceived collection of ideas. Yet without this hesitation, without this loyalty to opinions whose acquisition has been attended by its own difficulties, how much more chaotic life would be, how excessively mercurial! For inertia is as necessary a law of our mental life as it is of our physical.

CHAPTER VI

THE Sessions family was a very old lineage in Potsdam. They had come there in the early days with the Clarksons, shortly after Gouverneur Morris had surveyed the earliest townships of St. Lawrence County. Throughout the years they had secured large tracts of land, built a sawmill, gone into the lumber business, and established paper mills. With all their projects they made a great deal of money.

The most distinguished branch of the family lived on Elm Street. I passed their magnificent Georgian house every day when I went to church or school. They were the first people in town to have electric lights and a telephone in their house, and late winter afternoons as I returned from skating or sliding down hill I could see through the side windows of the stately colonial doorway the lovely color and elegance of their parlor. There, I thought, life must be lived with splendor and loveliness beyond my imagination. In the summer the Sessions' huge barn (they called it simply a stable), which seemed to have been finished with almost as much care and elaborateness as the house, and matched it with its brilliant yellow clapboards and white trim, was always a fascinating exhibition place of shiny carriages and glisteningly groomed horses.

One day, coming home from school with Ruth during that first year in Potsdam, I had noticed a very lovely girl walking along on the opposite side of the street who presently went into the Sessions house. "There goes Doria Sessions!" said my sister quietly, with an effort to conceal

her admiration and awe of a person who lived in such a grand mansion. I turned to gaze more frankly at the vision who had occupied most of my surreptitious attention all the way up the street.

As the years went by I saw this girl more frequently. Indeed, whenever Johnny Frobisher or Earl Purves or any of the rest of our gang used to be together and saw any of the Sessions, it was always the habit to call attention to them by saying: "There goes Mrs. Sessions," or "There goes Gerald Sessions," or "There goes Doria Sessions!" Our voices were always full of respect. To all of us they represented our first impressive acquaintance with "very rich people." The rest of the boys had known (knowing a person, meaning to us then simply to know who they were) them longer than I had (and some of them even spoke to them), but they had never reached the point of familiarity which enabled them to take any of the Sessions family for granted. While I, from the first time that I saw Doria Sessions, could never hear her name mentioned, to say nothing of seeing her, without feeling that sad pang of melancholy, that bitter-sweet yearning, which so fatally tempers the joy of a passion for something or somebody which it is clearly impossible to touch. She represented to me the unattainable princess of the fairy tales which I read so eagerly. In all of my imaginative reveries of heroism and love she was the one to whom I ultimately came after my greatest triumphs, kneeling before her with adoration and humility.

When my sister finally came to know her and to speak about her more or less familiarly around the house, Ruth herself magically acquired a new and prodigious importance in my estimation. My sister talked with Doria Sessions! She walked with her!! Perhaps she even touched

her!!! . . . For long periods I meditated in silence upon that intimacy, wondering how her voice would sound in conversation, how it would feel to stand close to her; if she ate, laughed, went to the bathroom, and slept like ordinary mortals who did not possess her divinity. Like a desire that is so strong in us, so overwhelming, that it temporarily precludes our making any effort to fulfill it, my passion to discover everything, the most intimate details and habits, the most esoteric thoughts, wishes and appetites, of Doria Sessions, was so overwrought, so impetuous, so paralyzing, that I could not bring myself to show the sheerest interest in what my sister said. I failed to ask her even the most casual questions.

One day I saw her walking up the street with my sister, and because they had passed the Sessions house and were going on toward ours, I decided that I would not go home; I stopped at Johnny Frobisher's, sent his younger brother to get my skates and hockey stick, and spent the rest of the afternoon avoiding our house as though it were an inviolable sanctuary. When it approached the time that I should be getting home in order to get my chores done before Father was through with work, I saw over the top of the cedar hedge which partially concealed the Frobisher ice-pond from the street my sister walking with Doria downtown. I skated more violently and conspicuously than ever, so that if they should happen to look in my direction they might be convinced that I was wholly preoccupied with playing, and had no time for girls. But just as I had concluded that they were going by without noticing me, my sister called from across the street and told me that Mama was expecting me home immediately. At supper that night I outwardly displayed a profound irritation when my brother Mathew began to twit me about

how much I had missed by not being home, saying that Doria was a very beautiful girl, very intelligent and had lovely manners—which I might well observe with considerable profit. I glowed with excitement and elation as I realized that the rest of the family were able—despite the impossibility of their ever attaining to my acuteness and appreciation—to see in this divine angel some of the virtues which were already so familiar to me; a familiarity not achieved from experience, of course, but by that inevitable projection into her of all the finest qualities that my imagination had been able to conceive.

2

As the winter wore on there came an awakening to a fresh initiation of life, mingling strange sensations of surprise and pain, shame and pride, with a startling awareness of a new attribute of manhood. For a few days I was sick in bed with the grippe. As I lay with the weakness of fever arresting momentarily the unceasing round of my normal physical activity—and stimulating, by that curious pathological phenomenon of compensation, an unwonted flow of mental animation—I began to think of the things I had done which I ought not to have done, and of those things undone which I ought to have done. For the first time in my life I consciously and spontaneously desired to be *good* and I silently prayed to Jesus to help me in this new resolve to live a life as much like His as was humanly possible. And in a flash there came to me a feeling of virtue that elevated my whole being into a delicious state of dazed relaxation: free from worries, anxieties, youthful avariciousness and selfish desires.

I resolved to be a friend to every one and to help them

all I could. I would tell Papa of how I had left Sally's halter shank untied and the stable door unhooked, and of the day that I purposely ran the bucksaw into a nail in order to make it dull so that I might not have to cut any more wood. I would come home from school every afternoon before I started to play and see if there were any chores that I could do for Mama. I would study harder in school and become the head of my class. I would speak kindly again to Marian Premier and help her with her arithmetic problems. An ineffable feeling of righteousness came over me as I lay there in my bed, and the prospect of doing even the most difficult tasks in the future suddenly appeared amazingly easy. In my imagination I pictured myself becoming so good, so Christlike, so generous and helpful that Reverend Miller would quickly recognize the change which had taken place and would soon be asking me to help him in the work of the church. My father would smile at me and realize how unnecessary the use of the horsewhip would be in the future.

I had entered the portals of puberty and in a passing hour of fever I was certain that my spirit had at last delivered itself freely and wholly into the sacred bosom of Christianity.

Incidents, the recollection of which in my previous existence had brought the most uncomfortable pangs of remorse and uneasiness, I now reviewed with the peaceful equanimity of a person "saved": occasions when I had charged peanuts at the grocery store without my mother's permission; the time when I had my bicycle tire repaired at the hardware store and told Mr. Needham that Papa had sent me; the fifty-cent baseball I had charged at Weston's and boastingly told my companions that my uncle had given to me; the nickels I had withheld from

the Sunday School collection in order to buy icecream sodas. Now I saw them as unfortunate evidences of the innate sinfulness of a poor, dark life which had not seen the light.

When my mother came into the room bringing me some bouillon and an orange for lunch, I smiled at her with the radiance of my new-discovered spirituality. I piously asked her if when she came upstairs again she would not bring me my arithmetic book and a copy of the Bible. A look of bewilderment came over her face, when from her half-bent position, leaning over the bed to straighten out the sheets, she stared at me, immobile and silent. Suddenly the quaintness and bathos of my request came pouring down upon me like a deluge of icy water upon the deluded security of a late-sleeper's warm somnolence. To set out on the road of righteousness was not so difficult in solitude as in the pitying glare of my own mother's uncomprehension. Downright wickedness might be subdued, but embarrassment was another matter. Indeed, at that very moment, in order to disabuse my mother of the notion that I had unaccountably become extremely virtuous—for the thought of her cherishing such a notion had suddenly become very embarrassing to me—I went on to explain to her that the reason I wanted the books was that I was curious to discover how far my classes in school and the Junior League had got ahead of me during my illness.

After my mother had gone out of the room, I was left alone with the dismal consciousness of an abysmal deception. In the agony of my dejection the perspiration poured from my fevered body and I was once more brought rudely down to earth from the dazed and dreamy heights of my brief spiritual elevation. When my mother brought

me the books a half-hour later I opened my arithmetic and went through a perfunctory, half-hearted, five-minute attempt to study and then innocently put it aside and picked up my Bible, whose pages I vainly explored for the next half-hour in a lackadaisical attempt to regain the beatified state from which I had just fallen. Presently losing all consciousness of my original quest, I turned to the most purple passages of the Old Testament and was soon lost in a maze of erotic revery, which ultimately led me to a tender, ineffable contemplation of Doria Sessions as I laid the Bible aside and sank into a tenuous, bodiless lethargy.

In those early hours of acquaintance with the strange and subtle phenomena of puberty—tested as they were with the added ordeal of fever—that curious, intangible, and chemical distillation of my changing metabolism (known in religious parlance as the Spirit) went groping for an anodyne with which to soothe the pain of life's frustrations, uncertainties and melancholy humors. Suspending itself for a moment in the lulling assurances and restful security of religion, the predominant paganism of its formula was asserted and precipitated the whole solution into the pleasant, though turbulent, waters of love.

But it must not be supposed that at thirteen this inevitable predilection of my nature had any cerebral significance to me other than to incur, during those frequent periods of introspection that afflict one's adolescence, a constant bedevilment at the instance of what I considered sincerely and devoutly "my better nature." So inescapable, so insistent were the ubiquitous influences which went to make up and support this "better nature," that the triumphs of my innate predilections, far from being attended by any mental growth or frank and justly deserved ela-

tion, in my conscious mind were meanly corrupted by a sense of sin. If I felt one thing, my mind was made to think another, so powerfully had the incessant protestations of Puritanism perverted my organism to the very antithesis of normality. Instead of the normal and healthy recognition that all evidences of truth, all trustworthiness, all pure conscience, originate from the senses, I had been poisoned with the illusion that the senses were the very root of all evil. And when I succumbed to those senses it was always in that state of exhilaration which momentarily—though unconsciously, of course—allowed me to feel such excursions from grace as beyond good and evil.

It was in an excess of an aspect of love felt for Doria Sessions—imagined, and severely forbidden me by all the respectable elements of the society in which I then lived—that I first encountered a happiness so enduring, so reliable, so encouraging, that it transcended, like a just and beautiful compensation, the trials of adolescence, giving birth to an inchoate, unrealized wisdom, whose substance was not to appear upon the surface of my consciousness until years later, when in the immovable fastness of an arthritic's solitude, my mind discovered what my emotions had long felt.

3

The accumulation of events, ideas, days, hours, experiences and physical changes culminated, one day in this tender period of my thirteenth year, in the sweeping, vivid climax of a realization that I would some day be taking my place in the serious activities of the world. In the future (quite distant, to be sure) I would become, according to the course I now elected to follow, a builder like

my father, or an engineer like the fellows from the Tech who went around the town with their fascinating transits during nice days in the spring. They seemed to be incredibly wise in being able to tell the distance across the Racquette River without having to measure it with a tape-measure. I might be a minister like the Reverend Miller, with his immaculate long black coat and carefully trimmed mustache, or a physician like the distinguished-looking Doctor Fuller, who seemed possessed of enough abstruse and magical knowledge to set him far above all the ordinary run of human beings.

It was at this time that the Normal girls became more wary about letting me sit on their laps and while treating me with more respect would frequently ask, "What are you going to be when you get to be a man?" Mother would say, if she happened to be nearby, that she hoped out of four sons at least one would be a minister. While Mama was talking about it, she was glancing at me with a look of such hopefulness and respect that I could not but feel extraordinarily important. The Normal girls, as though taking a cue from her, would also stare at me with an unwonted if insincere deference. I would feel then that no profession could possibly bring me more pleasure than the high calling of the Methodist pulpit, which, furnishing its ministers with houses, churches, ready-made admirers and the unparalleled privilege of monopolizing the hushed attention of large audiences week after week, gave one a life of elegant leisure and an opportunity to display his superior knowledge of the Bible, his infallible opinions, and great oratorical powers. But in the more difficult periods of solitary reflection I would always decide against a calling which seemed so lacking in opportunities for robust and varied adventures. Also, it might prevent one

from marrying an Episcopalian! Although I could not easily conceive myself marrying a member of a church which was, as everyone knew, nothing but an Anglicized Catholicism, I could not wholly ignore the fact that Doria Sessions was an Episcopalian.

It so happened that during that winter when such momentous decisions were being forced upon me the country was in one of its periodic and fatuous states of economic depression. My father, after several years of incredible success and disarming prosperity, could find no work to do in Potsdam. Mama worried. Papa, with his characteristic confidence and optimism, looked upon the situation as one that was to be remedied by the simple procedure of going to some place where there was work. He decided to go to California. It did not matter that such a journey seemed to my mother almost as daring as a trip to China or an excursion to South Africa. Her fears and trepidations served to add glamour to the venture and to give Father that feeling of added importance which he imagined must naturally attend a hero who sets out for distant and dangerous lands in search of sustenance for his family. "Why, Etta," he would say in his most casual tone of voice, "you know I wouldn't think of going out there unless I was obliged to. But anybody can see that this town is all built up and in these hard times there's nothing else to do but go where a man can git work. Besides, the West is still young, and with San Francisco just been destroyed by an earthquake that's the place to go."

So Papa went to California. The excitement of his getting ready, the fascinating postcards which he sent to us children from Chicago, from Omaha, from Lincoln, from far-off Denver and the outlandish Salt Lake City, and finally from San Francisco, all filled me with a new ad-

miration. And at each thrilling postcard, every new letter telling of the Pacific Ocean, palm trees, orange groves, wicked Chinatowns, Los Angeles and incredibly perfect climate, there rose in me a fresh determination to become a builder like my father. It seemed that nothing could be more exciting. I would go to the Tech, become an architectural engineer, and then go into the building business with my father. Doria Sessions could not help but have a certain amount of respect for a fellow who could use a transit, build big churches, and make long trips to California.

As though purposely to add confusion and uncertainty to the problem of what course in life I should follow, my oldest brother Mathew, who had graduated from the Normal in the previous June and had accompanied Papa to California, got a job conducting a band in one of the suburbs of San Francisco. He began to send home very impressive pictures of himself in a magnificent uniform standing on the podium in front of his resplendent-looking musicians. The pictures were invariably accompanied by glowing newspaper accounts of his concerts, filled with extravagant praise of his "precocious conducting" and his "artistic cornet solos." The effect of those pictures, and the breath-taking flights of my imagination as I saw my own name emblazoned among such words of praise on the public pages of a newspaper, was too much for me. No longer could I be content with the prospects of the comparative obscurity of the building profession. No longer could I think of foregoing the imagined pleasures of being applauded, with my name in the papers.

From the little bamboo whatnot where Mathew had kept the folios of music accumulated during his years with the Normal orchestra and the Town Band, I had many

times in the past carefully selected the most difficult-looking compositions, and, using my younger brother as an orchestra with his Christmas drum and tin flute, I had conducted the most moving, tempestuous and violent marches, overtures and storm music which my mind was capable of imagining. But now having achieved the dignity of thirteen years—and the size of a boy much older—I could no longer resort to such exercises of imagination in public. To have done so would immediately have placed me back in the category of childhood in the eyes of the rest of the family. Any public disclosure of my deepest thoughts or ambitions was inevitably accompanied by embarrassment. In the privacy of my bedroom I now set up one of Mathew's nickel-plated music stands and conducted my orchestras in silence, straining the efforts of the brass section, the tympani and cymbals to unprecedented *fortes* and incredibly fast *staccatoes* with terrific sweeps of my magic baton.

One of the Normal School girls, Alice Trine, who boarded with us, hearing me drumming over and over again on the piano a childish tune called "Chopsticks" with deafening effects, asked me if I would not like to have her teach me to play. I suspected that she had perhaps divined some hidden talent in me of which I was not yet aware, and that she actually could teach me to play the piano. So I consented. I began my lessons with the confidence that within a year I would be playing tremendously impressive solos at school assemblies and church entertainments. After two weeks I had reached the unalterable conclusion that piano-playing would forever be beyond the reach of my accomplishment. Secretly feeling that the accomplishment presupposed a faculty of which I was utterly devoid, I applied in private the designation

of "genius" (a word with whose strange and powerful significance I had just recently become acquainted) to all those amazing individuals who possessed it. As a person goes through life wholly unaware of certain virtues in an intimate friend until, suddenly, an occasion has arisen which has disclosed a knowledge, an insight, an eloquent articulateness utterly unsuspected, I came now, by my discovery of the apparently insuperable difficulties of music, to a revaluation of Mathew's achievements.

Conceding him the possession of "genius" and the faculty of perseverance which I did not have, I willingly left unchallenged Mathew's superiority as a musician, turning temporarily to the vaguer task of becoming a great engineer.

It is thus that all of us come to one revaluation after another of the achievements, the failures, the hopes, the ambitions of some one else's career. A more intimate acquaintance with the medium of their expression, the difficulties they have had to overcome, the skill which they have acquired in order to make the most formidable feats seem easy teach us. Yet at no time may we ever be sure that the revaluation of a person or even a work of art, which we have just made, is a final one. Indeed until our intelligence, our curiosity and our lust are finally arrested in a state of irremedial petrifaction, we must continue to readjudicate the dance of life. Just as now in the opacity of my physical vision I must enrich my appreciation of a blue sky of early evenings in January, seen twenty years ago through the window at the foot of my bed in our house in Rochester; because today, having encountered the word *cerulean* in a line of poetry, I have, for the first time, looked up its meaning in the dictionary.

CHAPTER VII

THE eldest son, my brother Mathew, had risen and developed to become the pride of the family. A serious, hard-working young man, I had frequently found in his spotless reputation a consoling, protective respite from the shame and shortcomings of my own repute. If I failed at geography or disgraced myself at grammar school "rhetoricals," it was palliating to reflect that, after all, the teachers and the pupils all knew that my brother Mathew was a distinguished graduate of the Normal School, and a very exceptional musician. They must thereby discern in me a great talent, an innate capacity which my present dereliction only momentarily belied.

In those early days Mathew's heroism was taken for granted. Anything which threatened to mitigate his greatness was squelched as a matter of course. I was passionately eager that he personally should enjoy the benefits of a reputation uncorrupted. That curious element of my vanity which sought to soothe and magnify the sense of importance which his name reflected upon me was mainly responsible for my efforts to conceal, extenuate, or forget any act or thought which might detract from his illustriousness. Quite naturally, also, if anything happened which offered a fresh assurance of his talent, my mind would seize upon it and enlarge its flattering implications. So great was the extent to which this practice was sometimes carried that it often presented the strange phenom-

enon of a sober belittlement of my own virtues in order that his might shine with a greater brilliance.

Yet, if in those early days of adolescence, Mathew became more of an oracle than an older brother to me, the respect which I gave his ideas was frequently nothing more than theoretical. There was in me a certain egotistical assertiveness, a manifestation of biological necessity, which made me resent, while theoretically approving, and avoid an undeviating imitation of those individuals for whom I had the greatest respect. A student who worships a great master will deliberately deviate from that master's interpretation of a sonata or a concerto in order to demonstrate that he, too, is an individual. He wishes to be an important entity, and hence worthy of his master's respect.

I resented the superiority of Mathew's character. It seemed so easy for him to be good. Of course my resentment was more of the solar-plexus than it was of the mind. Very rarely did it come to the surface of my consciousness. Indeed, it is difficult now to find tangible evidence of that resentment. In retrospect I realize that then he was associated with my father. He seemed to be on my father's side while Mark was on my side. He stood for the virtue, the austere superiority, the almost unhuman righteousness of my father, while with Mark I found an easy companionship, a quick understanding, a warm support.

Mark played football. He was the champion wrestler of the high school, a fast "track man" and a fine hockey player. He was very popular with the girls and he smoked a pipe. Often without being asked he would wash the dishes for Mama or clean up the house. He frequently used the seniority of his six years over me in an effort to lessen the severity of Papa's discipline whenever I got into trouble. Mathew would say, "Peter ought to be getting better

marks in school," or "He ought to wash his ears and clean his fingernails once in a while," or "It's a shame that Peter isn't half as interested in music as he is in baseball or hockey." Mark would praise my baseball pitching and tell me stories about his experiences with girls. Every one, whether lecturing me sincerely in the interest of my own welfare or teasing me on the pretext of warning me for my own good, would invariably conclude by saying, "Now do you think Mathew would have ever done a thing like that?" or "Why can't you be a little more like your brother Mathew?" or "Do you ever expect to get where Mathew is, if you keep on doing the way you're doing?"

My respect for Mathew was so great that I always *thought* that I *ought* to do things as he would do them. I nevertheless *felt* that I enjoyed doing things more as Mark would do them. That circumstance enlarged and complicated the conflict between my heart and my mind by implying that the latter could develop only by triumphing over the former. Indeed the aim of education then seemed to be to triumph over the things one enjoyed. Even physical exercise was ideally engaged in "for the aid and service of the mind." One must have a sound body in order to have a sound mind.

The evidence of my failure to develop any precocious intelligence is now, of course, very sadly plain. My adolescent mind accepted and approved of all those fanatical, perverted theories of "education" which were then considered all-important. Had it not been for my lower ganglia (that is, my gross body) I would very likely have been lost; I would have been so properly, so thoroughly "educated" by the time that I had finished school that I would never have had room for another idea.

Most all of us have in our youth been exposed to the

perverted mind-development-mania of formal "education." Those who succumb present in their maturity that sad spectacle of body which has been stunted and distorted by suppression, a bundle of neuroses. They have minds which have been so preoccupied with *hard* tasks in their youth that they are now completely hardened: no resiliency, no plasticity left; not the slightest chance for the infiltration of another idea.

"You may be sure," Miss Haywood, the teacher of the eighth grade, would say, "that the boys who have the highest marks in their lessons are the ones who will grow up to be our best lawyers, doctors, ministers, and engineers. They will be the famous and respected men in a few years. And the time is not so far off, as some of you boys think. Here you'll be going to high school next fall, and it will only be a short time then before you are men. And then if you haven't an education, what will you do? You'll have to dig ditches! You won't be able to play baseball or spend your evenings reading adventure stories. No, indeed."

The glistening snow of winter which invited me to go skiing, tobogganing and sliding down hill, to build formidable snow forts and to acquire the knack of throwing a snowball straight to the most vulnerable . . . the target! The red blood which charged my muscles with energy and enriched my gonads so that they would not be satisfied with those highly recommended mental activities of learning the multiplication table, playing scales on the piano, memorizing Longfellow's poetry, and parsing words from the "Lady of the Lake"! For those influences I am grateful; as I am for the thrilling flight of a cedar arrow and the interest of Grandfather, who taught me how to make it so that it would sail accurately through

the air; and for the unmanageable preference which I had in my youth for experiencing the pleasure of moonlit evenings in spring with the accompaniment of girls, as against the reputed joys of reading poetry which so felicitously described such experiences. Youth does not need to read poetry. It lives it—or should. Old age is the time for poetry: the poetry which is distilled from the lusty adventures of youth, and the lofty adventures of a mind which is nimbly functioning in maturity. Old age needs poetry as an anodyne for the sense of futility—the poetry of philosophy, the poetry of religion, the poetry which valiantly attempts—and that, of course, is the function of poetry—to give a meaning to this life which so obviously has none.

Yes, indeed, I am thankful for those influences; I am grateful to Mark, who appreciated the speed with which I could throw a baseball and praised the well-timed "breaks" of my curves; and to Doria Sessions, whose exquisite fascination diverted the flood of my sexual emotions at puberty from the putrefying channels of religion and the paralyzing sublimations of being an "ideal student." It seemed so easy for Mathew to be good. Indeed, he was so good, such a joy to the pride of the family, that as the years went on he could not be improved upon—or, rather, he could not improve. He could not change. He learned to smoke, and to drink a little. He even discovered that he was an atheist. But until the War came along and he went to France, there was nothing of any importance that he could ever learn.

Yet it wasn't the War or it wasn't France which restored his mind—at least partially—to a degree of plasticity: it was the Sauternes from Gironde and the brandies from Cognac.

Pour wine for us, whose golden color
Is like a water stream kissing flowers of saffron.

Pour us wine to make us generous
And carelessly happy in the old way.

More cups! More cups! for death will have his day;
His are we and he ours.

2

During this period I grew so rapidly, becoming so big for my age, that the phenomenon aroused almost daily comment from members of the family, visiting relatives, the clerks at the grocery-store, the Normal School girls, and the various ladies of the M. E. Church who couldn't avoid noticing me while paying their calls on Mama. Nearly every one had some theory concerning my extraordinary development. Mama, borrowing her conjecture from my maternal grandmother, supposed that it was due to the rest which my stomach had enjoyed during the period I had had typhoid fever some years before. Grandpa pooh-poohed such a notion. "Huh!" he would interject, "you wonder why he grows so fast? You'd find mighty little mystery to it if you'd just set still a minute and watch him eat. . . . I'll be a donkey if he don't swallow enough at a meal to keep a dozen blacksmiths goin' . . . Huh!"

Mark explained that my growth was perfectly natural because I was outdoors in the sunshine and fresh air most of the time, working, playing, and exercising. If I had not been helping him with the chores very regularly he would insist that I was of course so lazy that my body, having nothing else to do, simply had to grow.

Mathew, before he went to California, had occasionally made the generalization (with an air of one uncovering a penetrating scientific fact) that: "In the field of human biology one discovers that there are, roughly speaking, two general types: one in which the mind predominates and which is invariably weak physically, sometimes small, and usually distinguished by extraordinary intellectual development; the other in which the body predominates, invariably growing very rapidly and to unusual strength or size, and frequently characterized by a dulness in school and a lack of mental development when it reaches physical maturity." (Mathew was a small, dark-haired young man with bright brown eyes—and a comfortable reputation for prudence and scholarship.)

We always think less of those virtues and accomplishments which we possess easily. If we speak German well, we listen more eagerly to words in praise of our French, which is not so good; or if we dance awkwardly we are much more aware of a gain in gracefulness than we are of our skill on the trombone which we already play with great excellence. So I was vastly less conscious of my physical development than I was of my mental inadequacies and moral shortcomings. Indeed, with the exception of one pubertal detail, I rarely thought of my anatomical evolution. I wanted to be big, of course, so I could play on the high school football team. I wanted to be bigger than Johnny Frobisher; and I wanted to be strong enough so that when the dashing horse which drew Doria Sessions and her mother past our house on their Sunday afternoon drive would suddenly decide to run away, I, with my best suit on, could plunge out into the road, and, throwing myself in front of the violent runaway, save the ladies from a fatal accident. But beyond those ambitions towards

whose achievement I did exactly nothing, I harbored no uncommon awareness of my physique save for that one exception which I have just a moment ago mentioned. And in that one detail I was embarrassed by the magnitude of my superiority.

Among us boys, during our glorious hours of swimming along the secluded shores of the Racquette River, there existed a rivalry which, occasionally abandoning trial of strength and endurance for simple tests of size, invariably made me a champion. The associations which attended such a championship were not always flattering towards its youthful possession in a community whose Puritan notions penetrated even into the most abandoned moments of adolescence. Shame was my reward then for a magnitude towards the dependency of which I had not exerted the merest voluntary effort, nor had but the slightest willing concern. In later years there were many enjoyable reasons which turned my embarrassment into pride and my indifference into pleasurable interest.

3

The absence of Mathew and Papa made the household more carelessly happy. Though the coterie of Normal girls who boarded with Mama had undoubtedly admired Mathew and yearned for his attentions, they seemed now to lose under the immediate spell of Mark's good-humored disposition and his unconstrained graciousness all their uneasy thoughts of ambitious marriages. Even Sundays now took on a *dégagé* atmosphere. After Sunday School, which I attended willingly since it was now not preceded by the unendurable confinement of an hour and a half of church, but rather by a lazy extra hour in bed, I could

change into my old clothes and easily win my mother's indulgence for activities which were frowned upon when Papa was at home.

Not that she gave me permission to spend Sunday afternoons making hockey sticks in Grandfather's little woodworking shop in the woodshed, but having once reminded me that it was Sunday and that I ought to stop playing and working for at least one day out of the week, she would leave me to my own devices, never snooping around to see what I might be up to, and offering no admonitions unless I happened to openly violate some Sunday regulation before her eyes. On these latter occasions—which, incidentally, I seriously tried to make as few as possible—she would look at me with an expression which seemed to depict the shame and guiltiness she hoped I would feel. And she would say with calm piety, "Peter, Peter! Have you forgotten that this is Sunday?" or, "Darling, can't you find something else to do today, and put that off until tomorrow?"

Depending upon the degree of unwillingness which I felt, I would either leave the scene in silence, affecting a deep and irreparable sense of injury, or I would snarl my grief, "Gosh, it's getting so a fellow can't do a darn thing around here except sit in a chair all day and then go to bed!"—realizing all of the time, of course, that never before had I had such liberties on Sunday, yet greedily accepting the cakes and ale of my new life as though they were the bread and water of an existence which had succeeded a paradise of freedom and plenty.

But Mark, on the other hand, having greater privileges now than he had ever had before, showed, by his acceptance of them as precious responsibilities, his innate aristocracy. Though he liked church no more than I did he

modestly felt that it was incumbent upon him to represent the family at services each Sunday, especially since Mama, who was occupied this year with the care of our new baby sister, could not attend. And if he had more money to spend than he had ever had before, since it was now his privilege to do the shopping for the household, he spent less and less on himself. And because throughout youth his good nature and easy amenability had made him quite immune to the harsher aspects of Papa's discipline, he also for that very reason felt less of the common spirit of rebelliousness toward adult authority. He graced his position of authority with the gentle urbanity of a young man who might have known no restraint throughout his life save that which was willingly self-imposed. With all the popularity which the exuberance of his eighteen years, the charm of his barytone voice, his athletic prowess, and the eminence of being a senior at the high school gave him, he made it a point of respect to be at home more often than usual, and a matter of duty to help me put the finishing touches to the bobsleds (we call them "rips" in those days) which I had been laboriously getting together from my old sleds and numerous contributions from Grandfather's workshop. When he discovered that the cushion I had secured for my rip had been purloined from one of the pews in the M. E. Church, he said not a word.

The Normal School girls, after the first few weeks of remarking to Mama at each meal: "Doesn't the house seem almost empty with Mr. Holland and Mathew gone?" and, "I'll bet you miss them awfully, Mrs. Holland, but I guess we miss 'em almost as much!" soon began to speak of Papa and Mathew with less frequency and, indeed, even they seemed to enjoy themselves more as they realized that the happiness of the household was something more

than a brief holiday from which they were suddenly to awaken into the constrained atmosphere of stern duty. These daughters of ministers, deacons, and pillars of sundry Methodist churches from the smaller towns surrounding Potsdam presently began to blossom from the quiescent, chrysaloid stage of their metamorphoses. Their faces gradually changed from their expressionless, green immobility into an open-eyed, alert awakening, bringing a sparkle to their eyes and changing the customary green of their complexions to a vivid pink.

One morning Alice, feeling so conscious of her new freedom that she was eager to test it to extraordinary limits, came down to breakfast without her corset on. To be sure, this most daring violation of a custom rigidly prescribed for girls of Alice's figure and her seventeen years was noticed by neither Mark nor myself, so perfectly were the dresses of respectable girls in those days in Potsdam designed to conceal the true contours of the maidens whom they were supposed to adorn. But my sister Ruth happening to put her arm around Alice as they left the dining-room together, withdrew it with such startled and conspicuous haste, blushing and giggling with the grotesque modesty of her sixteen years, that Alice, as though forgetting the resolution of boldness with which she had originally struck out into the uncharted territory of feminine freedom, suddenly became self-conscious and hastily shot a panicky, surreptitious glance toward Mark. The glance, an instantaneous survey of both of our faces, discovered an alert masculine curiosity written there. It fatally reopened those well-worn prudish channels in her own cerebrum, and thereby guided the whole flood and energy of her reaction into the task of painting her cheeks, her neck and her forehead a significant crimson.

Mark, with that intuition which is occasionally possessed by men but always exclusively attributed to women, not only sensed the concealed aspects of the immediate situation, but he also seemed to divine the yearning which had evolved them. Ever eager to put one at ease in the frequently embarrassing accompaniments of iconoclastic adventures, he changed his smile for a look of serious cogitation and said with an assumed scientific detachment: "If a girl today has the courage to go without corsets she not only shows a lot of good common sense, but she also looks ten times more healthy and attractive."

Though I wanted to share in the respect which I suspected was due to Mark's point of view, I nevertheless felt the giggling bashfulness of the girls to be more exciting and was secretly hoping that some more remarks might be made which would have even a franker suggestion of feminine intimacies and sexual piquancy. It was as if my mind, so concerned with the lofty emulation of Mark's grand manner, so taken up with the admirability of this virtue which I was assuming, could not be bothered with the racy and forbidden preoccupations of the nerves which served my gonads and my adrenals.

I walked across the sitting-room to the big chair in which Alice had sat down so self-consciously but a few minutes before. From first posing myself with an affectation of extraordinary casualness on the arm of the chair, I slid gradually down onto her lap (a habit which though begun years previously with the indulgence—if not interest—of the various bevies of Normal girls which boarded at our house year after year, still continued, though with much less frequency and much greater enjoyment on my part and an obvious embarrassment upon the part of the girls). My mind did not then pay enough attention to what my

body was doing to detect how patently its actions were belieing the rarified elevation of my cerebrum. It was not until the unwontedly yielding response of the flesh around Alice's waist suddenly sent a shiver of delight and a shudder of portentous danger coursing through my body that I realized with a flash the shameful ignominy of my position. I suddenly stood up and walked over to the piano. The censorship of my mind, having at last been brought to a critical consideration of the unmoral activities of my libido, and thereby having heightened my enjoyment with a tingling sensation of wickedness, began now to wage a battle with my impulses.

That original urge which had impelled me to sit for a moment on Alice's lap to discover how her waist felt when it was not surrounded by the hard, unresisting wall of a corset, was now giving way to a desire which was customarily much stronger in me. I wished to see how Alice looked (indeed, to see how almost any girl looked) without her clothes on. And because of this conflict the ideal of "Pure Thoughts" (impure thoughts meaning almost any thoughts which had to do with the pleasant gratification of one's bodily impulses and appetites) and the irrepressible flood of my desire to explore the mystery of sex, I sat there on the piano stool in such deep abstraction that I neither noticed my mother come into the room nor heard her ask me twice if I would not water the horse and bring her a few sticks of wood from the woodshed. Her third request she preceded by an energetic shake of my shoulder. "My soul and body!" she cried. "Are you deaf, Peter, or wool-gathering, or sound asleep settin' up! I've spoke to you twice to give the horse a pail o' water, and got no more motion out o' you than as though I were talkin' to a statue!"

And then as I looked up at my mother with the disturbed, guilty look of my adolescent conflict still written on my face, she smiled through her impatience and sought to extenuate the obvious stupidity of my reactions by saying, "My goodness, I guess it's 'cause you're growin' so fast you haven't got time for anything else."

But once out of the house my abstraction vanished. I began a round of alert physical activity which, commencing with watering the horse and cleaning out the stable, culminated that evening in taking my new "rip" over to the Cedar Street hill. There in the frosty sparkling loveliness of a midwinter night, I shed the melancholy conflicts of adolescence for the untroubled merriment of youthful exhilaration.

Thus indeed are all the problems of adolescence solved—in the spontaneous pleasure of the outdoors, free from the corrupting hot-beds of schools and churches, and the prurient atmosphere of Puritan households; away from the pollutions of adult attention, adult respectability, and adult ideals. The solution to my first grave problem of adolescence was fortuitously made easier that night on Cedar Street hill in the miraculous circumstance of meeting Doria Sessions face to face for the first time, feeling the substance of her divinity and hearing the music of her voice.

Although Ruth had known Doria Sessions for several months and had brought her to our house on numerous occasions, I had never met her. A circumstance which was entirely due to the hypocrisy which had blossomed so in me that I was already a master in the practice of affecting indifference to the very things which fascinated me the most with their promises of unbelievable pleasures. I could display also the most pretentious enthusiasm for the repulsive manners and substances of Righteousness, whose single

recommendation was that it helped me along the path to Heaven—or, rather, more importantly, it snatched me occasionally from the road to Hell.

Yet in those moments of happy solitude, away from the influences of home, church, and school, the tantalizing attentiveness of the swarm of Normal girls and the distractions of adult civilization—that is to say, during those moments of self-reliance and courage I often had—I was inspired to resolve that the very next time I saw Doria Sessions I would speak to her with the gallantry of a knight, smitten in love by his Lady and valorous enough to declare a hopeless bondage. But later as each opportunity presented itself, the stability of my resolve became a phantom and vanished in the ethereal limbo of neurotic desires. Just as even our strongest desires, if they are accompanied with the conviction that they are unattainable, will never get beyond the state of wishes.

Confidence or desperate necessity is the impelling stimulus to action, as it is the fructifying fertilizer of sound philosophy. It was desperate necessity which forced me to meet Doria Sessions that night in midwinter on Cedar Street hill. When I stood there proudly by my rip waiting for the passengers to fill it up so that we might once again guide the fleet vehicle on another fast and thrilling descent to the bottom of the hill, I could not know that out of the shadowy figures which stood there, the presence of Doria Sessions would suddenly materialize. Nor could I know that that presence once materialized would immediately come toward me and sit down on my bobsled directly behind the position which I must necessarily take in order to steer it downhill. Not being forewarned, my will to retreat was overcome by the more powerful necessity of appearing to be a gentleman before the eyes of Doria. As the bobsled filled up

I took my position as the brave guide of the precious cargo and presently started on the swiftest, most thrilling, most wonderful journey that I had thus far taken in my uneventful life.

Mutely, doggedly, I took my position on the bobsled. My whole being was electrically charged with strange, ineffable sensations aroused by the speculation as to whether Doria would, according to the customary ritual of sliding downhill, place her hands over the top of my shoulders or around my waist. And when, after sitting down, I felt her gloved hands gently grasping my sweater it was as though an electric circuit were suddenly completed. All the accumulated electrons created from month to month by each new vision and thought of Doria, stored up in the pole of my receptive body, instantaneously discharged themselves back into the hands of her who had generated them. My substance shuddered with strange delight. I grasped the steering-bar in front of me and yearned for the rip to start its flight down the hill, wishing that it might gather such speed and encounter such danger as would require me to display superior skill and superhuman courage. Now that I had at last come in contact with Doria Sessions—that her knees were pressing against my sides and her hands were grasping my waist—I felt that I could and that I must do something to prove to her that by her contact I had ceased being a common mortal and had suddenly become a god.

Though the bobsled was heavily loaded and traveling with a speed at least equal to any that it had ever made before, it seemed to be going disgustingly slow. It would have taken the speed of lightning to satisfy me. Even that would have been an incident which I would have accepted with easy nonchalance. The world was at my feet. With Doria sitting so closely, so snugly, behind me, a new vista

of life appeared before me: a vision of myself striding triumphantly over the world, looking down upon it with an infinite pity and understanding.

At that moment, as though to retard my spirit from soaring to far more dangerous heights, the rip came upon the mundane peril of a sharp curve. I leaned toward the inside to indicate the change in the center of gravity which would be necessary in order to make it without spilling. Doria failed to follow my signal . . . the curve was upon us in a flash!

"Lean!!" I shrieked. But it was too late . . . the rest of the passengers, failing to get the signal, were unprepared. The rip swayed precariously, and suddenly shot over, catapulting us swiftly into the hardpacked snow of the curve and scraping several inches of skin from my left shin. There were howls of disapproval and derision.

"Why don't you learn how to steer?" . . . "For Cat's sakes, give us a warning before you try to murder us!" . . . "Holy Moses! You'd better take a few more lessons before you take any one else for a ride!"

I stood up, torn between the urges to vindicate myself and to protect Doria. "For the love of Mike," I retorted, "don't you all know enough to lean when you go around a curve?"

"Yea! Yea!" they shouted. "Don't you know enough to give us a signal!"

I looked toward Doria. She was still sitting in the hardpacked snow holding on to her ankle. My mouth was already open, to scream the announcement that I had given a signal. But instantly the idea vanished. There came to me the realization that I might for the first time in my life be a hero. I rushed toward Doria, exclaiming, "Are you hurt? . . . I'm sorry! . . . It was all my fault! . . . Did you

sprain your ankle! . . . It was all my fault!" I did not dare touch her, since to have done so would have brought down upon me the ridicule of the rest of the crowd. But as I stood there leaning over her she looked up, wiped some tears from her eyes and said, "I'm all right . . . I'm not crying. It's just the cold breeze that makes my eyes water. Besides, it wasn't your fault, anyway; it was mine."

Then, like a lady of twenty instead of fourteen, she reached her hand toward me with the unspoken but unmistakable indication that I might help her up. As I did so a new feeling was born within me. I experienced the sensation of being a hero. I felt the reward of self-sacrifice and had dim inchoate intimations of the blindness, the futility, the pitiable emptiness of a life devoted wholly to self-vindication. Yet somewhere in the midst of this elated feeling there resided an element which could neither be resolved into the emotion of pleasure nor eliminated. An element of censorship made me sense that my heroism, my self-sacrifice, had not been deliberately intended without regard for my own selfish feelings, but rather had been suddenly provoked by the opportunity of appearing before Doria as a much better and greater person than I actually was.

But now, as Doria had risen before me, such considerations lost all chance of entering my consciousness, since I was involved with the more important problem of when to let go of her hand. If I should release it too soon she might think that I worshiped her less than I truly did, or that I was angry at her for causing the rip to tip over, or—worse still—that I was unaware of the customs and manners of her class of society and hence did not know just how long a girl's hand should be held under such circumstances. If I did *not* release it soon enough the rest of the crowd would

be embarrassing me with remarks about my attentiveness, which would be unforgivable.

Again I resolved to sacrifice all of my feelings in order to help her. I would continue my solicitude until she indicated that she had no further need of it. And once more I was to be convinced that genuine virtue always received its reward, for just as I determined to forget myself in her service she peered intently into my face, smiling—not an ordinary smile, not frivolous or perfunctory, but one which expressed such feeling that it might well have turned into tears—and opening her eyes wider as if to indicate that I might have the privilege of seeing better into her very soul which must have resided directly behind them, she said, "Thanks for helping me and . . . and everything . . . I'll be all right in a minute, if you'll just help me walk a few steps." The rip had been righted by the other boys. I led her over toward it and insisted that she sit on it while we drew her uphill.

4

At the top of the hill Marian Premier's house sat back from the street across a broad lawn decorated with iron statues of a St. Bernard dog and a many-antlered stag, an imposing mansion of the period of the 1890's. From its elaborate bay-windows and impressive, silo-looking turret guarding the right front corner facing the street, to its florid cornice made up of every conceivable twist which nature had found possible to evolve in the minds of a carpenter-architect and a resourceful woodturner, it expressed the height of artistic yearning of Mr. Premier—and indeed of the average successful merchant, banker, and manufacturer of Potsdam in those days. I had been in it

once, at a party which had been given by Marian a few years previous, during the height of Papa's rise and prosperity. Marian had had many parties since then, but neither Ruth nor I had been invited, despite the fact that during all of that period in which I was not invited to her house she was extremely nice to me in school, paying me more compliments than ever, talking with me in a jolly way as though to indicate to the rest of the boys and girls that I was one of her treasured friends.

Now as we reached the top of the hill and I saw the lights gleaming through the plateglass windows of the Premier mansion—giving them the appearance of burnished brass shields held at the unprotected openings of dark castle walls and warning such interlopers as me against ever trying to enter—I did not, for the first time during the many winters I had been sliding down the Cedar Street hill from this very spot, feel that wretched pain of envy and inferiority. I smiled to myself now as I gazed at the house with the consciousness that the girl who was riding on my sled was so far superior to any of the Premiers that they would figuratively break their necks in order to ingratiate themselves with her and her family. While I, but a moment before, had been allowed to gaze through this girl's eyes into her very soul as she looked at me and spoke to me with an expression which, I was sure, she had never given to another person in her whole life.

I even felt sorry for the Premier family, who had struggled so hard to curry the favor of Doria Sessions, when I thought of the possibility of their coming out of their castle and observing that after all of their efforts the prize which they sought had fallen to me, a *parvenu*. As I looked toward the house I hoped passionately that the big, heavy plateglass door would open and Mrs. Premier would come out,

come down the walk to witness me in all of my glory. The door stayed closed. But as I turned around to assist Doria from the bobsled Marian Premier came hurrying up the hill. The news of the accident had been relayed to her on her last coast to the bottom. She rushed to Doria's side just as I was helping her to stand up.

"Darling, darling," she cried, "are you hurt badly? Come into the house and Mommy'll call Dr. Botsford immediately! He'll hurry right here! Oh, you poor dear! What is it, your ankle?"

I was angry. Why couldn't Marian Premier leave Doria alone? She saw—or at least she ought to have seen—that I was taking care of her and that she needed no further assistance. I clung to Doria's arm with defiance and was soon repaid for my tenaciousness.

"I'm all right! I'm all right!" Doria insisted. "It's nothing. Thank you! Thank you! I just banged my ankle and it was a little sore at first, but really it's all right now."

My hopes soared; my elation grew; but just as my triumph was about to be complete, my prize threatened to vanish from my hands. "I will go in your house for a few minutes, though, Marian," said Doria, ". . . if you don't mind. I feel a little cold from riding up the hill instead of walking."

It was then that I suddenly and at last came down to earth and realized that, after all, I was an alien to such superior beings as the Sessions and the Premiers. A wave of resentment surged up within me, from the soles of my twice-tapped shoes to the frayed edges of my three-year-old toque. Abruptly releasing Doria's arm I stood there, my face flaming with embarrassment, bitterness and defeat. I would have turned and run had I not thought that to do so would only add to my disgrace. Forgetting all about the glance

which she had given me at the bottom of the hill I was only certain that when any one more nearly approaching Doria's own social class was around she was eager to forsake my assistance for his company.

But just as my wretchedness seemed to have reached the depths of all that I could bear, she turned to me. Like a princess in a fairy tale, who at the critical moment will not allow her lover to be slain by the king, she said, "Peter, you'd better come in too, because you must have hurt your leg *awfully* when the rip fell on top of it." And as I stood there mute and immobile, unable to displace the misery and resentment which had been gradually overpowering me, unable even to grasp at once the full meaning of the magic words which had just been spoken, Doria seized my arm and started walking toward the house.

At last I was in the Premier mansion again and I had in effect been brought there under the auspices of the most captivating member of the Sessions family. While I had never entered a household of any importance before with such triumph and such ease, the little trivialities of velvet rugs, ornate bric-à-brac, Mrs. Premier's haughty nose-glasses, the unwonted solicitude of Mr. Premier, the ever-impressive curtain of beads and seashells which separated the parlor from the sitting-room—the ponderous distraction of material things—all combined to prevent me from savoring and enjoying the victory of the moment.

Mrs. Premier smiled at me with such warm hospitality as made her severe, sniffish-looking face appear almost kind and human. "When do you expect your father back from California?" she asked me. "Isn't he fortunate, though, to be spending the winter in such a heavenly climate!"

I forgave and forgot the fact that she had not invited me to any of Marian's parties since that first and only occasion

years before. I was ready now to accept the exclusiveness of her society, against which I had previously so bitterly complained to myself, as a quite natural and necessary condition for maintaining a certain standard of excellence. I felt that now, having been accepted by the Sessions and the Premiers, a further extension of democracy on *our* part was not only unnecessary but very undesirable.

Later, when the coasting party was over and I was drawing Doria home on my bobsled, all thoughts and feelings of social triumphs vanished from my mind and senses, leaving me with the pure, unviolated happiness of serving this princess whom after years of Galahadian restraint I had at last so fortuitously met. I knew that life could never again be the meaningless round of the trivial pleasures of youth which I had previously known. It opened up now before me a vast promise of magnificent splendor and perpetual bliss. I knew that I could now ascend to such heights or accomplish such feats as had before seemed impossible. My strength had so increased that the bobsled which I was at that moment pulling seemed as light as a feather. I changed the rope in my hand from one finger to another, proving to myself that what had formerly seemed a task for my whole hand was now, with Doria as a burden, but a bagatelle for my little finger. I did not doubt that, having come to myself, having discovered the tremendous sources of strength within me, I would some day quite naturally become the president of the United States and that Doria, as my wife, would come to me for advice upon important matters.

But as I drew near to the Sessions house and could witness again the imposing grandeur of its Georgian majesty, a sense of disquietude assailed me. The purity of my happiness was no more, giving way to the speculation as to how

I was ever to become anything very great if I did not already live in a house as magnificent as the Sessions'. I turned to look at Doria (perhaps to console myself with a joy which was permanent—her reassuring loveliness) and encountered her smile.

"Let me walk now," she said. "I feel like walking. My ankle actually doesn't hurt any more. Besides you must be awfully tired, drawing me so far." She laughed with a cheeriness that sent chills of pleasure through my whole body. "*You* get on!" she cried. "Let me pull you! I want to get warmed up."

The thought that she might walk by my side if she got off the bobsled did not influence me to urge her very strongly to ride the rest of the way, and as she stood up and took a hold of the rope alongside of my hand, I had the power of only a feeble protest. Encouraged by this intimacy I began to tell her with stammering words and halting sentences (which after they were uttered, I was certain, had destroyed all of the beauty and the eloquence of the ideas which I had intended to express) of how extremely happy I was to have met her and to have talked to her even though I could not at the same time help feeling very sorry that she had to injure her ankle in order to bring it about.

"Oh, that's nothing," she said, "my ankle. Don't feel bad about that. It was all my fault anyway. Besides, I'm awfully glad it happened."

And then I tried to paint for her the pictures of all those many occasions upon which I had tried to conceal my interest in her—pictures recurring so vividly upon the screen of my memory that I lost all self-consciousness in delineating them before her mind's eye. I told her about the day at the ice rink when I had skated so violently and so preoccupiedly as she passed by with my sister; the innumerable

occasions when I had seen her a long way off and had crossed the street in order to avoid the embarrassment of meeting her face to face; the time, when on coming into the house and unexpectedly hearing her voice, I had passed from the dining-room into the reception-hall to avoid her instead of going through the sitting-room, which was my usual custom.

I was rapturously surprised to learn from her lips that those same pictures which I had supposed had no actuality and certainly no importance in the mind of any person but myself were present in all their details on the precious curtain of her memory. It seemed to me that this revelation of Doria's unavoidably disclosed a virtue in me which in my most egotistical moments I had never dreamed that I possessed. I felt magnified for a moment into the stature of a superior being. Although the virtue was one which I could not name, nor to which I could assign any definite tangibility, I vaguely sensed that I possessed some sort of attractiveness to girls. I began to wonder what it was, if there might not be some hidden quality in me which I couldn't see but which was startlingly apparent to Doria. Otherwise why had she remembered so vividly all of those many occasions long past when I had so fleetingly and inconspicuously appeared before the veil of her consciousness?

We were now standing in front of the Sessions' house. It was time to say goodnight. But having met my princess at last and having discovered that by some miraculous, inexplicable circumstance I was perhaps endeared to her, it seemed that nothing would be harder to bear than to ever separate from her again. If I could only live in the same house with her I was certain I could accomplish tremendous things. That very thought started a stream of fantasies flooding through my mind which became at once so

intimate, so daring, so severely forbidden, yet so transportingly wonderful that I could only listen and talk mechanically as I concentrated my attention upon their imagined delights.

Doria, noticing my abstraction, suddenly exclaimed: "Oh, I'll bet I know what you're thinking about! Your mind is 'way away from here! What will you give me if I can guess where it is?"

The nature of her challenge awakened me to the reality of the moment. The mere suggestion that she could even dare to imagine what I had actually been thinking about —the very boldness of the thought that she could pry into the contents of my reveries which, though wholly concerned with her, I could not in my moments of wildest imagination picture her divining, since I was so positive that she was so far above such impure ideas—all sent a shudder of delight and terror through the tingling reaches of my senses.

Accusingly she insisted: "You were thinking of Marian Premier!"

And then by that strange phenomenon of our ego which, in the naïveté of adolescent love, assures us that there is no more flattering or more certain evidence of the bondage of another person to ourself—no more positive stimulus for the inflation of our feeling of self-importance—than the manifestation of jealousy, I suddenly came to realize that Doria was, after all, a very human princess. She was a girl, primarily, beneath the halo of divinity and royalty which my imagination had given her. With that realization there came both sadness and courage; the melancholy sadness that accompanies the revelation of the irrevealable—the discovery that she whom we thought was impossible to attain is after all attainable; and the brazen courage which

annihilates our humility when the divinity whom we have worshiped discloses passions like our own. Just as a goal which we have long considered to be utterly unachievable by ourselves and hence more precious, more wonderful, more valuable than anything else in the whole world, loses a large part of its magnificence in our eyes as we awake one morning to discover that we have achieved it, so Doria the princess now, despite all of her wealth, her beauty, and her social superiority, became, in the midst of my exaltation, a girl who had fallen in love with me.

After I had said goodnight to her and was pulling my bobsled home through the world of stars and snow crystals, familiar, friendly maple trees and golden-lit windows, walking up Elm Street (though hardly conscious of walking since my feet never seemed to touch the hard-packed snow of the sidewalk) and thinking of the triumph which I was about to experience when my family and my friends found out that Doria Sessions liked me, the whole appearance of the universe changed before my eyes. Instead of the phantasmagoria of strange substances external to myself for which I had learned throughout the thirteen years of my life names which signified almost nothing, I saw it all now as an anthropomorphic world—material things emanating a spirit of which I was a part, a million friends with whom I had a special relationship of perfect understanding, love, mutual aid, and unique superiority. The cedar hedges smiled at me and said, "Good for you, old boy!" The vast, blue ceiling with its millions of sparkling yellow eyes continually gazed down upon me with a look of understanding and kept whispering, "You're coming along fine! I am beginning to feel very proud of you!" Old Mrs. Prince's house stared at me with an old-maidish sniff, but it, too, realized that I commanded respect.

I closed the kitchen door behind me and shut out that universe which I had known so intimately during the ten minutes it had taken me to walk from the Sessions house to my own, but there remained the memory of its magic, the stamp of an unforgettable awakening, as I confided to Mama with hysterical triumph that I had walked home with Doria Sessions and that she had invited me into her house.

CHAPTER VIII

Nor all of the baths of our household could be taken on Saturday night, so there was always a residue of ablutions which had to be crowded into the brief and bustling hours between late Sunday morning arisings and the deadline of the first bell for church services. Invariably, inevitably, there was a feverish rush of last-minute preparation for church. On account of the emergency there was a general let-down, a sort of hysterical negligence, in the observation of many of the conventions and proprieties of a very Methodist and very moral household. The Normal School girls would carelessly hurry through the halls from the bathroom to bedroom, bedroom to sitting-room sewing-basket and back to bedroom in a disarray of flying kimonos, uncovered petticoats and uncombed hair, which, under normal circumstances, would have been convincing evidence of incorrigible wantonness.

Doors would not always be tightly closed when one was in the process of dressing. Seven-year-old Johnnie could dash from the bathroom into Mama's room with his clean underwear held in front of him and not "a stitch of clothes on to cover his nakedness." The bathroom door might just as well have been without its bolt, because during these hours it could not be used to insure privacy, for if one of the girls was bathing, another had to use other appurtenances of the bathroom for curling her hair, and if Johnnie were scrubbing his neck or dabbing futilely at his ears,

either Mark had to take a shave or I had to have a reluctant bath.

These periods of scurrying and excitement were always a pleasant interlude for me between the pain of getting out of bed and my mother's last-minute inspection as I went out the door and started down Elm Street for Sunday School. Though the spectacle of Alice or Jessie or Caroline in kimono or petticoat was not a particularly exciting one in itself, it always seemed to suggest a world of visual delights which might be terrifyingly wonderful.

But on this particular Sunday morning, after Doria's transcending revelation of the night before, I consciously banished all thought of wicked curiosity, all lascivious pleasures of peeping, and went about my preparations for Sunday School with all the dignity that I imagined the husband of Doria should have. I was so determined to be upright that I bent backward. When necessity took me past the open doors of the girls' rooms I was not satisfied to look straight ahead, but I must also close my eyes. When Mark, coming into my room to get back a necktie, began to relate to me how during the night before, in coming down the upstairs hallway he had met Charlotte arrayed only in her nightgown and had stood there for five minutes embracing her and kissing her until a noise had warned him that their surreptitious spooning might be spied upon, I listened coldly with no show of interest. I struggled with the desire to tell him that such foolish things as he was describing to me no longer held my interest. While Mark, realizing I suppose that there might be other reasons, more momentary and physiological, for my indifference to his voluptuous recital, smiled indulgently and left the room without another word.

But just as I was struggling before my mirror with the starched rigidity of my stiffest Sunday collar and thinking

of how I could contrive to let Doria see me in my Sunday best without appearing to urge my presence upon her, Alice, who had stimulated my imagination just the morning before by coming down to breakfast without any corset on, called down the hall, "Oh, Peter! . . . Peter, could you come here a moment and do something for me?" The power of habit, the habit of responding eagerly to that particular tone, that irresistible inflection in one of the Normal girls' voices, impelled me to reply, "All right, I'm coming."

I need not have answered Alice at all. As I walked down the hallway to her room I came to the conclusion that for just this once I would let my newly acquired dignity take a vacation. I pushed open the door of Alice's room without knocking and saw her sitting before the mirror of her dresser clothed in a thin cotton undervest and a pair of muslin drawers. Whether Alice, having set out on the road to emancipation from prudish restrictions, became so bold as to extend her liberty to the point of insisting that there was modesty even in nudity, or whether, sensing by her intuition that any great display of embarrassment—now that I had seen her and the harm was already done—would simply aggravate a pruriency in my supposedly innocent mind, I do not know. Whatever the cause she made no fuss beyond a momentary and natural expression of surprise as she turned her head and saw me standing there staring at her.

Making no effort even to cover her voluptuous knees, which were completely nude, she said, "Peter, will you go downstairs for me and ask your mother if she's got any white elastic?"

And at that instant, partly from the casualness of Alice's voice with its suggestion that between us there existed a

profound understanding, an intimate camaraderie which preserved any and all of our actions from the necessity of defense or explanation, and partly because the intimacy of the scene suggested to my imagination that I was once more acting the part of Doria's trusted husband, I changed from a being dominated by the passion to see and to feel into a super-Sir Galahad. I went downstairs on my errand, pitying those poor weak creatures who had not yet steeled themselves in self-control.

2

Too late we learn that our life has its own plan, that it takes its pattern from nothing else that has preceded it or is contemporary. If Shelley wrote sublime poetry at the age of nineteen, we—no matter how passionately we live solely to emulate Shelley—will struggle like a lion and bring forth sonnets at twenty which are sonnets only by the courtesy of our critical indulgence. And if Schumann said of Brahms when Brahms was in his tender twenties: "Hats off! gentlemen, a genius!" we—no matter how hard we punch the piano, grow a beard, study theory and smoke Brazilian cigars—will in the end discover that our string quartettes are not masterpieces, but are played mainly because certain fiddlers and 'cellists are our generous friends. Our life follows a capricious pattern. We are, in the final analysis, distinct individuals although we belong to the Elks and sing songs at the Rotary.

So I found in my quixotic career as Sir Galahad that there were various embellishments and bastardized imitations which not only expediency but the necessity of being myself demanded. And if in my Knights-of-the-Round-Table conduct toward Doria I called her Guinevere and

plagiarized certain other prerogatives of Sir Lancelot to accommodate the lure of her lips and to satisfy the compromises which I had to make with the biological insistences of my own peculiar make-up, she accepted me as a veritable Galahad, allowing me to carry her books home from school, saddle her pony, make a stirrup of my hands while she mounted horseback, and embrace her warmly when the impulse of the moment demanded it and there happened to be no one looking. We talked of marriage, undying love, and fidelity to death. We plotted ways of circumventing the disapproving eyes and meddlesome tactics of her spinsterly aunt; and when, just before Lent—my father being still in California and in the absence of his usual restriction I was allowed to step on the stage of the Town Hall Opera House and become an actor in a home talent show in which Doria was one of the star performers—I decided that instead of becoming an engineer I would make myself a great actor, she confided to me that she hoped more than anything else to become an actress. If she did we could travel around the world together sharing the applause of enthusiastic audiences.

3

Winter was coming into its grey decline. March thaws had turned the world outside into an ashen harmony with the atmosphere of Lent. The blackboards in the eighth grade classroom at school reflected the dull and deadening influences of parsing and extracting square roots. Black crows shrieked in the tops of barren trees. At home the chimneys of the kerosene-oil lamps grew smoky and discouraging. The only bright moments in my leaden world were those which I spent in the dazzling splendor of the

Sessions' house. There, all too rarely, Ruth and I went to practice acting and to rehearse cantatas for Easter.

But even there the atmosphere of seriousness penetrated disquietingly. While I wanted to become a great actor, as I had wanted to become a great musician and an engineer, I did not want to be bothered with uninteresting tasks of memorizing recitations, learning gestures and making myself enunciate properly. If I could not *play* at becoming an actor, but had to work instead, the excitement of applauding audiences would lose a great deal of its glamour. Doria's aunt, who taught elocution and was the head of the only musical conservatory which then existed in Potsdam, insisted upon telling me not to say things in a sing-song voice, that I must use more expression and that I must not stand before my audiences like a bump on a log. As though despairing of my ever learning to express myself properly by her merely telling me how to do so, she would ask Doria to make my speeches as they should be made, so that I might at least learn something from her example.

I would sink into a dudgeon from whose depths I would look upon the scene before me as one in which I could never achieve the superior rôle that I was so certain in the beginning would naturally fall to me.

Doria would use a more gentle manner in trying to impart to me the technique of the art which she had already so precociously mastered under the instruction of her aunt, complimenting me upon an aptitude which did not exist and encouraging me in an ambition which I was growing less and less eager to realize. The joy which I had originally felt in being at last received into the Sessions' parlor and occupying so much of Doria's attention under such dazzling circumstances became inversely proportional to the number of occasions during which she demonstrated her

own histrionic ability and attempted to develop mine. I said to myself with the repetitiousness of an adolescent who has discovered at last the consoling truth of a tiresome and hackneyed proverb, "Alas, true love never runs smooth. Alas, how well I now realize it." During those melancholy moments when I had to pile out of bed into the cold greyness of early morning to dress, take care of the furnace, and water the horse, I felt that though the sadness of my life was unique I would bear it. Sir Galahad, of course, went through a great deal, suffering terribly, but he could not have known of the unequaled pain, the transcendant pleasure of such unparalleled love as I had for Doria.

4

Late that spring it was pleasant to go about saying: "Papa is coming back from California," and to hear people answer, "Oh, indeed—he must have had a wonderful time . . . I'll bet you'll be tickled to see him back." Though his absence had meant for me a holiday from physical chastisement, it was wonderful to feel the distinction and importance of having a father "return from California." The memory of harsh discipline was momentarily submerged in the anticipation of social aggrandizement.

He arrived with his telescope-grip filled with oranges, picked with his own hand from those unbelievable trees in that incredible country. His bags, boxes and suitcases were veritable mines of souvenirs: picture books of Pike's Peak, the Grand Canyon, San Francisco's Earthquake; sea-shells and star-fish from Catalina Island, pieces of the Petrified Forest, baskets of orangewood, trinkets from Chinatown. For days the greatest hardship in life was to have to leave the contemplation of this booty and the fascination of Fa-

ther's replies to endless curious questions for the hollow monotony of school. In desperation I would carry off photograph albums and mementoes to display proudly to the teacher and my companions. When this lost its novelty and impressiveness, it left me with the sad emptiness of a declining feeling of glory and importance. But the experience taught me nothing, for I was not yet ready to learn of the treacherousness of pleasure and pride unseasoned by conflict and unearned by struggle. I went my adolescent way, in search of something for nothing.

The elation of the household over Father's return was as shortlived as the reflected glory which I experienced therefrom, for not long after his arrival the futility of his expedition to California became more and more apparent when all of his excuses and explanations for his failure to get a job did nothing which we could see to improve the gradual decline of our comfort. There were bills to be paid at numerous stores and he had not brought back gold from California to pay them. There were things which we wanted to buy, but could not. We must pinch and strain, suffer embarrassment and penury because he had failed to do what he had set out to do; what he was supposed to do; or what we expected him to do.

So, with the protected and fatuous point of view of youth which demands and cries for so much, and in turn gives so little and so arrogantly, I inwardly resented and blindly criticized his failure to provide me with security and comfort. The figure of omnipotence which my childish imagination had once given him now began to crumble—just as do the images of perfection which, born in our own minds, we transplant and incarnate in some one else in order that we might have the pleasure of leaning on a strength which we ourselves cannot achieve. When they

prove themselves illusions, it arouses us to cry out to the world that we have been injured and deceived, cruelly and without reason, forgetting, if ever realizing, that the world owes us nothing.

I was thinking that I would work and earn money. Though such an upsetting circumstance was hard to reconcile with the chivalrous career of a young Sir Galahad, the influence of the Alger books was strong enough to enable me during the emergency to see myself as composite hero of "Strive and Succeed," "Sink or Swim," "Pluck and Luck." In prospect, the main factor to disturb me was the contemplation of what my companions would think (what Doria would think of me) if I had to go to work. Becoming a hero was extremely pleasant to dream about, but the embarrassment of the struggle was always there, reminding me and urging me to postpone the commencement of my efforts until a more propitious moment than the present one. School had come to an end and summer vacation had started, but I was not yet quite ready to put my decision to work into definite execution.

One afternoon Father, who had in the face of necessity swallowed his great pride as the builder of the M. E. Church and taken odd jobs about the town building piazzas, making petty alterations, putting on screen doors and shingling roofs, came home early from work and asked me to step into the house, saying that he wanted to see me. The seriousness of his voice reminded me of similar portentous requests which had always preceded a whipping. Despite the fact that he had been home for many weeks and had used only his voice as a means of disciplining me, I trembled guiltily as I walked into the sitting-room.

But just as I was determining in my mind to exert my

utmost powers in the support of my innocence (innocence of what I did not know) and speculating even upon the possibility of brave defiance, I discerned in the expression of his face—into which I peered most anxiously as I entered the room in order to discover, if I could, the degree of his anger—that twinkle of amusement, and satisfaction with himself, which invariably preceded the conferment of his favors and the perpetration of his rare jokes. Such a glow of pleasure began radiating through my being that I immediately felt that nothing he could give me or say to me would furnish me half the joy as the unspoken assurance which I had already received that, whatever my sins were, they had not yet been discovered and thus I was neither to be punished nor forced into the issue of rebellion or acceptance.

My father said to me, "I have some good news for you!" There were several moments between his announcement and my full realization of the possibilities of his words. "You know Mr. Austin, who is blind and a dealer in horses and cattle and farm machinery? Well, he spoke to me today about a good reliable boy to drive him around the country. He is familiar with roads, and knows all the people. It would be quite easy for him to direct you. Would you like a job at five dollars a week?"

In the face of such an unbelievably wonderful prospect of actual, tangible happiness, I thought it would be crazy to show how I felt. If anybody knew how much I would like a job driving a horse around the country, driving all day with nobody else to take the reins out of my hands, he would certainly feel that it wasn't right to heap so much pleasure upon a single boy. If Papa knew how the very thought of earning five dollars a week—of my own money—sent shudders of delight up and down my spine he could

not help deciding that such intense happiness was actually sinful. So when I said half-enthusiastically to my father, "I guess it would be all right. . . . I guess I'd like it", it was not because I could not conceal my enthusiasm that I permitted some of it to enter into my remark, but because I hoped to convey with the affectedness of my assumed feeling the impression that though I was very willing to do whatever he might suggest I was not too eager to drive a horse about the country or to get five dollars a week for doing it.

The next morning, in my irrepressible eagerness, I was up before six o'clock and eating breakfast with my father in preparation for calling upon Mr. Austin a full two hours later. It seemed taken for granted that I must realize what a lucky boy I was and that I must be very careful not to let my enthusiasm run away with me. Before eight o'clock I was at the back door of the Austin house, waiting in hope and trepidation, saying one moment to myself, "Of course, I'm going to get it! I'm going to get it!" and the next moment, "You're crazy! You're crazy! You won't get it! Not a chance! Not a chance!"

The door opened and Mrs. Austin said, "Good-morning, sonny, won't you come in? I guess you're Mr. Holland's boy. I'll call Mr. Austin and he'll be right down to see you."

I entered into a misty, tenuous state of suspense like that which would overtake my whole being during that interval between the instant at which I would leap from a high springboard and the second my body was enveloped by water. I was a helpless mass hurling through the air waiting for whatever words Mr. Austin might say to interrupt my flight through the nothingness of uncertainty with the solid substance of a decision. Or perhaps I was

like that amphibian creature, the frog, leaping from a watery world for the first time on to the promised land of new experience into that incredible atmosphere called air, existence in which calls upon new powers, new adjustments, new responsibilities. I have never felt more daring, more enterprising than I did that moment when I thrust myself by my own will and physical propulsion before Mr. Austin to ask him for the privilege of driving his horse around the country for him and implying that I was willing to accept five dollars a week from him for doing it.

I had met one blind person before in my life and he was an extraordinary individual. He frequently played piano solos at chapel in the Normal School, and his reputation as a good student was known far and wide. His ability to go almost everywhere with only the external help of his cane was one of the great miracles of life which had been violently impressed upon me each time I attempted—in imitation of him—to walk along the street with my eyes shut. And now as Mr. Austin walked toward me, smiling and extending his hand, I again felt that inexpressible awe and wonder which one commonly feels in the presence of a genius, a miracle, or an inexplicable universe. As he placed one hand on the top of my head, letting the other move sensitively over the muscles of my shoulders and arms, all thoughts of the primary purpose of my visit vanished momentarily from my consciousness. I said, "How do you do, sir?" with the respect and feeling with which I would have spoken to God. I did not know then, but sensed by that instinct which youth has for divinity, that a man becomes a God when, out of the trials, the struggles and the handicaps of his existence, he makes an art in life which transmutes them all into a triumphant harmony, a dynamic peace which welcomes strife.

"How are you, my boy?" He spoke to me with dignity and kindness. "You're tall enough and strong enough. Can you harness and hitch a horse all right? No need to ask you if you know how to drive, eh?"

An invigorating feeling of confidence and courage came over me. "Yes, sir, I can. I've harnessed and hitched all of Father's horses." As I heard myself say "Father" instead of "Papa" I felt exultantly that no greater proof of my newly acquired manhood could possibly have been given. The success of my life no longer depended on the mere task of getting the job I had come after.

"Well, young man, you can start immediately. I'll show you the horse that we're going to use today and while I get a snack to eat you can be getting him ready."

As I descended the rear steps into the garden I reviewed the strange surroundings, through which I had passed but a few moments before with such trepidation and hope, as the familiar and friendly scenes of a victorious battlefield. The brown-and-white barn (through whose open doors I had viewed the formidable array of brand-new mowing-machines, brightly painted reapers and a terrifying brigade of other farm implements), the severe rows of apple trees and currant bushes, the threatening neatness of the vegetable garden, all appeared to me now as cohorts I had conquered. Mrs. Austin explained to me that her husband took care of everything outside of the house with all the resourcefulness of a king who was in full possession of his powers of vision. It seemed to me now that as his knight I had come into some of the greatness which a moment ago I had recognized in his presence. I was eager to show him that I was a worthy knight.

After he had pointed out to me the spirited chestnut stallion which we were going to use for the day, explain-

ing to me that his name was Old Reliable, I seized the harness which he indicated and began my labors with speed and enthusiasm. However, before I could get the harness on Old Reliable's back, the king, in whose service I had just become a knight, gently gave me my first rebuke.

"Old Reliable would like a grooming before he has his harness put on. He's a pretty proud old horse, and he always feels better when his coat is clean and shiny."

I was deeply ashamed that I had forgotten a duty which suddenly appeared to me to be of the greatest importance. And though I could not then consciously appreciate the fineness of the spirit which insisted upon excellency in a detail which he could not see and hence apparently enjoy, I did feel the kindness of that spirit which was so great that it could even consider the pride of a horse. With those simple words the dignity and pride of the animal were so vividly imparted to me that I determined at once to take them into my own keeping and to respect them as carefully as Mr. Austin did.

I led the horse out from the stall and groomed him furiously until his coat glistened and his forelock bristled with appreciation. When, having harnessed him to Mr. Austin's well-kept buggy, I drove him out to the stepping-stone, my whole being glowed with *his* contagious pride. I felt a great happiness over a deed well done.

Mr. Austin appeared in the front doorway dressed in a duster and cap and carrying a cane which he called his "sounding stick." Unhesitatingly he walked straight to the stepping-stone, then around to the front of the horse, feeling of the traces, hold-back straps, bridle and reins, and running his sensitive hand over the stallion's legs and belly. "You'll do, my boy! You'll do!" In a moment he was back

to the carriage step again and climbing into the buggy beside me. "Just one thing . . . this rein is twisted. I do like to have them straight."

Strange things were happening to me, as the impressions of new experiences were flashing through my senses. For the first time in my life I did not resent a criticism. I became dimly conscious of the majesty of human dignity. This blind man inspired me with a new feeling which had nothing to do with his blindness. His outspoken manner, the absence of apology, the beautiful directness, the sincerity of his smile, gave to everything he did, everything he said, an air of such genuine authority as I had never before encountered. My admiration poured out of me. "I can't see how you do all these things! I can't imagine how you do it!" I closed my eyes for a moment to reassure myself of that lost sensation in a world of blackness.

"Well, sonny, perhaps some day you'll understand. You know now, don't you, that if you prune an apple tree it gathers more strength in the rest of its branches. Well, the same thing applies to a human being. If you take away some of his faculties he has to develop others to make up for the loss. There are a lot of things in life which we creatures think we can't git along without, but when we haven't got them any more, we find that we can."

I was in a new world. For the first time things such as Mr. Austin was saying seemed to have a real meaning. I had never before heard words which were so convincing. (Fifteen years later the prophecy of them was fulfilled with an added significance—a significance, however, that had never been intended. I kept saying to myself in those first hours of darkness, when my eyes would open and yet would not see, "Some day you'll understand . . . indeed, indeed, some day you'll understand!" I touched again the

greatness of Mr. Austin and arose from that magic contact with a mended faith and a new courage.)

We were trotting along Pierpont Avenue, getting out into the country on to the road to Brownville. I was thanking Providence for the kindness it had shown me in giving me such a wonderful experience. I was no longer working now. I was driving a magnificent horse for a great man named Mr. Austin. And Mr. Austin was telling me a story: "It was just out along this road, about four mile, on a crackin' good farm owned by Tom McDougal—one of the squarest Scotchmen in this here section—about twelve years ago, that I had the occasion to examine some of his stock. I got mighty interested in a big three-year old stallion—a Kentucky thoroughbred and as spirited as they make 'em. He reared around considerable while Tom was putting the halter on him, and as I looked at the flash in his eye I said to myself, 'There's a horse that I'd like to own.' We walked him out into the barnyard where I could see him move around a bit—and there, sonny, we made a mistake. We stood there talking over his good points when suddenly he gave a big leap, throwing his head high in the air and snatching the halter shank out of Tom's hand. I thought for a minute a bee had stung him, for he seemed to turn into a plunging demon. In a twinkle he was rushing straight for me, with mouth wide open, teeth bared, and those big eyes of his blazing like something possessed. He looked more like a fiery dragon you read about in your fairy books than a domestic animal. I was rooted to the ground. I couldn't move. Within a few feet of me he reared on his hind legs and striking out with his right front foot he caught me full in the face."

I turned to look at Mr. Austin and saw on his face neither fierceness nor melancholy, but a calm smile which, as I re-

called it so vividly many years later, seemed to express some secret triumph, some hidden joy.

"And, sonny," he went on, "that is the last thing I shall ever see. He knocked me unconscious, started to paw me around on the ground, and if Tom's shepherd dog had not rushed up and grabbed him by the heel—that dog had always been a great friend of mine—he would have finished the job which he had started so well."

Tears had been coming into my eyes and for a moment I had tried to stop them, but now I felt so deeply that such things as keeping back tears did not matter. "And did he kill the horse?" I blubbered out.

"No, sonny. When I got up around again I went out there with a friend of mine and bought that beauty, because that is what I had wanted to do in the first place." I was sure now that he was going to tell me that he had taken revenge on him himself. My Christian training still permitted a great deal of room for revenge. Yet there was something in me that made me hesitate to ask him baldly what he had done to the horse—something in me that dimly sensed this man's incapacity for inflicting cruelty. But I was curious. "Where is he now?"

"Why, sonny, he's right there in front of you."

Though I heard precisely what Mr. Austin said, other words kept echoing through my mind: "He should have been cut to ribbons!!! He should have been cut to ribbons!!!" The reins tightened in my hands and I looked toward the whipstock. But of course there was no whip. Then I began to wonder where those words kept coming from. I felt ashamed of them. They didn't belong to me. Where had I heard them? Ah, at last . . . years before on the farm in Morristown I had heard my father say them. A neighbor had been kicked by one of his horses. Father had

said, when relating the incident, that the man should have taken the whip and "cut the horse to ribbons." "He should have taught him a lesson." (Father was always teaching lessons by means of the horse-whip. Not that he was cruel—he was really a kind man. But the "Virtues" in this sinful world had to be upheld and abetted by him; even at the cost of using Solomon's rod.)

Mr. Austin, I realized, was not a "virtuous" man; that is, he had no "virtues" to uphold. There seemed to be nothing outside of his character—no principles, or ideals, or righteousness—which he felt it his duty to support. He was himself, first, last, and always; after my brother Mark, he was the first man I had thus far known who gave me a sense of the dignity that was possible to a man. When he said anything or did anything I never had to wonder how much of either was a lip service to righteousness and how much was genuinely sincere. It was all sincere!

As we traveled along over the winding, beautiful country roads Mr. Austin would direct me, now to this turn, then to that, past one farmhouse and in to another. Everywhere the farmer's greetings would be very cheery and respectful. Mr. Austin would examine the cattle and horses with uncanny cleverness, running his hands all over them, feeling of their teeth, talking to them like a doctor with a patient, and asking the farmer but one question: "What color is the beast?" Then he would state his price. If the farmer accepted, all right; if not, nothing more was said about it. He never bargained, and the men with whom he dealt had learned never to try to urge him.

We would be out in the country for two or three weeks at a time, traveling over the greater part of St. Lawrence County, and never at any time did Mr. Austin lose his bearings. He asked me to tell him about everything which

struck me as being new in the countryside, especially new houses, or barns, or silos. After I had told him about some detail which I would immediately proceed to forget, I would be amazed several weeks later to pass the same spot and hear him repeat to me what I had told him. I was so proud to be "his eyes" that I presently got into the habit of telling about every little thing as we passed by; until he would reach over with his hand and squeeze my arm very kindly and say, "You'd better take a rest now for a while, or you'll be all tuckered out." He did not talk to me very much, but when he *did* speak his words were full of meaning. He had a way of teaching me things that made me more and more eager to have him continue.

In late summer, on our last trip, I began to feel that to leave Mr. Austin and go back to school would be one of the greatest tortures that I could ever endure. I had told Father that I would like to work for him forever and I had urged him to let me stay with him and not go back to school. Father's work throughout the summer had not been especially profitable and I had begun to feel that my five dollars a week would help out a great deal. (When I was with Mr. Austin I was always filled with generous impulses to help.)

"That's the proper way to feel, Peter," Father would say, "and I'm glad you've got that spirit. But if you worked now, when would you get an education? And don't forget an education is the only way nowadays of getting anywhere in this world. You see what Mathew's has did for him."

But for a few weeks, at least, I saw that Mathew's education could not bring me half the pleasure and satisfaction that I derived from my association with Mr. Austin. In the end it was Mr. Austin who convinced me that I ought

to go back to school. I told him that I wanted to stay with him. He smiled first and then his face grew serious. "Well, young man, that wouldn't be right for yourself. And the most important thing for you is to be square to yourself. If you learn to be just with yourself, you'll be doing more for other creatures than you could ever do any other way. Become independent. Don't lean on other people. You see, if you kept on working for me you'd be depending upon me . . . you'd be leaning on me. You don't want to do that. This is my job. You don't want to become a cattle dealer. I know that. You told me you wanted to become an engineer. Maybe you do. But if you find out you don't, take up something else. Just be sure, whatever you do, that it's what *you* want to do, not anybody else. People may tell you that that's selfish, but you'll find out that it does a lot more good in this world than most of this unselfishness that they talk about."

When we had returned home and I was saying good-by, Mr. Austin tucked three ten-dollar bills into my pocket. "There, my boy, you've done a very good job. You're going to high school this fall, aren't you? Well, go and do as good a job there." He clasped my arm and looked at me with that curious, visionless expression which seemed somehow to penetrate deeper than any eyes possibly could. "Good-by, and come over to see me and Old Reliable once in a while." I walked out of the yard, happy and crying. I felt so good and yet so sad that as I walked along the street I didn't much care whether people noticed that I was crying.

CHAPTER IX

WHEN it was decided that we were to move to the village of Morristown—following my father's visit there during which he had learned that the town was just coming into a great boom, that some wealthy people were going to build a big hotel and make a summer resort out of the place, and that the village trustees had voted to erect a Town Hall—my mother went about the house with an inspiring smile of relief on her face and a perennial eagerness to tell Ruth and Johnny and me how much better life would be there for all of us than it was in Potsdam. She had been born in Morristown, married there, and had lived there most of her life. She loved the little village of five hundred people, the old St. Lawrence River, the little Methodist church, the rustic ease of its society, as she had never learned to love Potsdam or its people.

In Potsdam she would say: "Things are a little bit too fancy. There's so much education here that it makes a poor ignorant person like me feel uncomfortable. It's fine for the children, but I guess I'm a little too old-fashioned to git used to it. I enjoy more talkin' to people that ain't always so particular about their English. And . . . I don't know . . . but somehow the people in Morristown seem different. They may not be so stylish, but they're a plagued sight more friendly. And that ain't all," she would go on. "I'll tell you this much, that it don't cost half as much to live in Morristown as it does here."

It was not that Mother didn't like Potsdam. Indeed, she

liked it very well. But she was always eager to see in whatever change Father made a new hope, a new security, a new promise that the family was going to get along better than before: that they would stay together, that the children would go to school, that the simple joys of domestic life would continue uninterrupted. Once shortly after her marriage she had gone to an old fortune-teller who had told her that she would have a large family and that she would always be happy so long as they were together, even if they lived in nothing better than under a shingle in the corner of a fence. Mother had believed that prophecy religiously. Indeed, it was more than a belief. It was an instinct, so strong and obvious that when the fortune-teller had simply told what she had seen so plainly written on my mother's face, Mother—feeling no doubt that the depth of her instinct must certainly be unrecognized by any one except herself and those strange people possessed with occult powers—immediately decided that henceforth she could not help having "some faith, at least, in fortune-telling." So now that it was decided that the family was to move to Morristown she immediately set about preparing herself and her family circle for the greater happiness which she knew was going to exist there for all of us.

I was eager at first and could think of nothing but the excitement of moving, and of those pictures of the St. Lawrence River which my imagination now so anxiously conscripted from my memory, enlarged upon and colored for the enhancement of my anticipated pleasures. But after the rooms of the old house in Potsdam were emptied of their furniture, I had a feeling of regret and melancholy. As I stood there looking for the last time out of the front door through those colored panes of glass, thinking very consciously that I was leaving, leaving, never to return

again, that house suddenly appeared to me as a castle in fairyland—from its earth-floored cellar, where Mother used to store her pickled pears, to the rough-timbered garret with its dark cobwebby recesses under the eaves.

(And now, whenever in those moments of wistful reverie I try to construct the image of an Ideal Home, the perfect domicile of comfort and happiness, my fancy forever comes back to that house, bringing with it a nostalgia that is as inescapable as it is beautifully sentimental. No other kitchen could ever be like that kitchen with the cookstove roaring on a winter's day and a batch of bread and cookies pouring out their ineffable odors from the oven! No other parlor could ever be like that parlor where I had listened to an orchestra with all its fascinating instruments for the first time, and where in hours caressed by magic I had danced around so many Christmas trees with their bright candles sparkling into the dim corners where Santa Claus might possibly be lurking, the frost-covered window-panes glistening with Christmas cheer! . . . Ah, those Christmases! . . . Can it be perhaps that all of us with our wistfulness and yearning, our melancholy futility, are thus because we are forever searching, searching in vain, to recapture the felicity, the charm, the unadulterated merriness of those golden anniversaries of our youth? . . . We can't begin to count again the host of things we seek in that enchanted house of our youth. We do know that ever since we have grown to the hard realities of manhood we have always had the hungering desire to go back there some day, buy the house, and live in it for the rest of our lives. What we seek most there we do not know—perhaps it is the impossible fairyland of our youth; perhaps, after all, we would revert to infantilism.)

2

Doubtless some one has said before that rivers get into one's blood. Happy is the man who has experienced it. Supremely fortunate is he if the river happens to be the St. Lawrence; for with the majesty of that great river incorporated into his being a man may face life with a magnificent courage, a splendid dignity and a vision of rich and rugged beauty. It will forever be for him a mighty pattern, an inspiring panorama of a Promethean struggle, fortitudinous and serene. People speak of the sacred Ganges; but the St. Lawrence never aspires to mysticism or sanctity. It is ever grandly human—the Titan always, in preference to the Olympian. If there are those who prefer the futility of the sea—that huge amorphous metaphor of human existence, which strains and struggles only to remind us of the essential and tragic purposelessness of life, which holds so mercilessly before our eyes that constant symbol of the infinity of death—there are others who see in the stalwart, steady flow of a river the invigorating symbol of an art in life which transcends futility.

But just as there are people who live in the shadow of the Louvre, the Metropolitan or the Cathedral of Chartres and pass by each day without the slightest change in their blood-pressure; human beings who turn the dials of their radio from a Bach suite to the more stimulating rhythms of Coon-Sanders' jazz; solemn mortals who read the Psalms of David and then mouth them in church; so I, arriving in Morristown, looked upon the St. Lawerence and saw in it a grand place to go swimming, a swell place to fish, an ideal spot for skating in the winter, and a perfect river on which to go boating.

The masterpieces of art and the majesties of Nature are

indifferent to our appreciation. Day after day the St. Lawrence unfolded before my obtuse gaze the glories of its elements. In the morning it was a limpid mirror, reflecting the bottomless sky whose clouds vainly attempted to conceal a blue infinity. In the afternoon, when a fierce breeze from Canada swept across it, it would suddenly become a lashing mass of white-capped exuberance. In winter it would change its dress first to a glistening shimmer of frozen silver, then to a brilliant garment of drifted snow-crystals. And though the preoccupations of my adolescent pleasures were like a tough skin which defied the penetration of any sensation or idea beyond such half-realizations as, "Isn't the river pretty tonight in the moonlight?" or, "Gosh, doesn't it look great in a storm!" year after year that river kept saying: "Look at me now, for I shall never be the same again—tomorrow I shall be different, and day after tomorrow also, and on all the days from now to eternity I shall make a different pattern from any I have made before! Look at me now and see immutable mutability . . . and remember, Peter, that I keep going . . . it may all be purposeless, but, nevertheless, isn't it beautiful! . . ."

Day after day the St. Lawrence was gradually penetrating my obtuse gaze, until many years later, when through the wards of City Hospital I would hear the rattle of that iron ambulance as it carried the dead off to the morgue, I saw it flowing: eternally, lyrically, beautifully flowing, in death and in life its courage bestowing.

3

From my window, in the little brown house in Morristown into which we had moved, I could look out across the

St. Lawrence to the beautiful and foreign shores of Canada. I remember that as I would stand there in the morning, clothed only in my underwear, not enough awake yet to be aware or interested in what the day might bring to justify my proceeding any further in the process of dressing, the varying shades of green and brown in the pattern of Canadian fields would hold me fascinated—pastures, woods and lawns, the whole panorama of the land appearing to be tipped up from the shore-line like a huge map lifted by one edge at an angle from its horizontal flatness.

The room itself in which I stood was something toward which I unconsciously turned my back with relief. As I kept complaining to my mother after the glamour of its novelty wore off, it was an awful come-down from Potsdam. And as I stood there gazing out its window it seemed as though I must find in the strangeness of those foreign fields—a strangeness which my imagination, responding to the demands of my preconceived notions, insisted upon giving them—some beauty, some pleasure, some wonder which would absorb me with its novelty and uniqueness, to compensate for the lost joys of a more elegant existence in Potsdam. And during those few moments of vagueness which marked the transition from sleep to the bright concern of thorough wakefulness, the fascination of gazing at those foreign fields would submerge my half-conscious complaints of the inadequacies of Morristown.

I was always, during those moments of the morning which preceded my arising from bed and standing before the window, irritatedly reminded that our present house had no bathroom or toilet, and that irritation would cause me to despise all the more those nocturnal concessions to the absence of water-works in Morristown. A custom which in the beginning seems to us quaint and not without charm

grows despicable and annoying once we are forced to adopt it and expose ourselves willy-nilly to its shortcomings. Moreover, the fact that there was no furnace in the house and that my room, which I no longer held in private, but had to share with my younger brother Johnny, was heated by the solitary, ugly black stovepipe from the kitchen stove, made me unhappy.

I, who had wanted to live in a house like the Sessions', must now struggle for the greatness I aspired to in a lowly, countrified place like this. It was deadly discouraging. What could I achieve in a house so uncouth, in a town which had no opera house; whose sidewalks were clumsy affairs of wood instead of concrete; whose Methodist Sunday School had no orchestra; and whose only schoolhouse was a rustic frame building instead of a classic monument of sandstone and granite?

Yet as I would stand there by the window, immersed in that view across the St. Lawrence, I would momentarily be lost in a different and happy world. The elation I felt would stimulate me to imagine enjoyable things which the day might bring; and suddenly I would take an interest in dressing. I would throw on my clothes, rush downstairs, grab a cookie from the breakfast-table and dash out of the house down to the river.

Along the shore of the river I was happy. If the morning was calm I could walk out on the boat-works dock and peek down into the clear water, always with the expectation of seeing a big pickerel or an enormous black bass. If the river happened to be rough I would watch, fascinated, the waves pounding the rocky shore or hurling strange pieces of driftwood onto the gravel beaches in the little "harbors" which I had named after the principal seaports of the world. Sometimes I would hear the seven o'clock

whistle of the sawmill, and would then have to rush back to the house to eat my breakfast and get ready for school.

From the river to the school was like a journey from sunshine and happiness to a world of dark discomfort. The school in Morristown, instead of being founded upon aspirations for enlightenment, or a yearning for knowledge which would enlarge the spirit and set the soul free, seemed to be a reluctant concession of the village trustees to the new-fangled nonsense of "book-l'arnin'." Its sessions were opened with long prayers and readings from the Bible. Its teachers were selected on the strength of their adherence to one of the three dominating evangelical faiths. Its consuming ambitions apparently were to use the courses of its curriculum as instruments for teaching the students a stern discipline, a rigid respect for tradition, a harsh adherence to duty. The boys knew scarcely any games and the girls, with but a few exceptions, dressed in old-fashioned clothes and wore their hair in pigtails.

High school was a miserable disappointment. In Potsdam I had had such happy anticipations of the grand life I would have when I at last graduated from grammar school and passed into the superior atmosphere of high school. There, such a step marked very noticeably the accession to a proud dignity, an enviable elegance. But in Morristown there seemed to be not the slightest distinction attached to such a momentous change. There was no football team on which one could become a hero, no glee club where one could have a jolly time. Most of the boys played baseball very poorly, and it was impossible to organize them into a team. They wanted to play three-o-cat, and to bat all the time. If they couldn't bat very often, they lost interest and either quit or played indifferently. For the most part they were crude and stupid and seemed utterly unaware of such a

thing as real companionship. It seemed as though I would never again have a good time in school. I was convinced that even the algebra and the Latin—which were new subjects to me, painfully dull and inscrutable—would be entirely different if I were only learning them in that wonderful high school back in Potsdam.

4

Often when we get away from a thing, a person or a city which annoys us, and see it from a distant and different perspective it takes on a charm which we had never dreamed of. Morristown possessed the virtue of being able to be seen from a distant perspective. When I, having taken a ferry across the St. Lawrence to Brockville, would stand on the Canadian shore and gaze back at the village from which I had just come, that tiresome and too-familiar world in which day after day I had so many problems and experienced so many disappointments would suddenly appear so lovely, so endearing, so strangely fascinating, that I immediately would become impatient to get back to it and explore those new and indefinable delights which the glamour of distance now revealed.

Morristown would then appear to me as a beautiful village of terraces. I could see plainly on the first terrace along the shore the railroad depot, the charming pill-factory, the motorboat works and the sawmill. On the next terrace the business street—with its hodge-podge of storefronts, blocks, the Free Library, the Frontier House, and the stone domicile of the weekly newspaper—lost its ugliness, and into the foreground of industry and the background of softly outlined trees and the varicolored dwellings of another terrace above it, it blended like the rugged daubs in a virile

painting, transforming themselves, when seen at a distance, into magic and graceful chiaroscuros of highlights and shadows. From still another terrace the old stone windmill seemed to survey the village at its feet like a hoary, paternal sentinel, observing, without interfering, the antics of its charges.

Then in my imagination I could see myself traversing the familiar yet now strangely foreign streets of this distant town. I was taking flying dives from the very top of the old windmill down past all the terraces, over all the house roofs into the aquamarine waters of the river. I was standing, giant-like, behind the green schoolhouse, giving it a shove with my foot and watching it roll, heels-over-head, cellar-over-chimney, down the steep terraces into the river. Indeed, from that perspective—and with the aid of my imagination—I was doing so many of those things which I had long wanted to do in Morristown but could not in the face of the insuperable obstacles which then confronted me, that I at once became happy over the thought that I lived there and that I would soon be going back to it to explore it anew.

Once I was back, the familiar scenes assailed me, and, strive as I would, I could no longer recall those "indefinable delights" which I had so distinctly anticipated but a few hours before.

When I came in view of our house, which was on the second terrace from the river, I tried in vain to place it securely in the vision I had seen from across the river. The locust tree, which (in itself, very beautiful) stood in the front yard, once again stuck out like a rugged daub of glory, refusing to blend with the bricks of the house chimney, the iron pump at the well, or the drab little house in

the rear of the yard which, when speaking politely, I called "our bathroom."

From my visits to Canada I would usually return just in time for supper. And so it was that once I entered the kitchen all thoughts of the Morristown I had seen from across the river completely vanished from my mind. I was hungry! And the sizzle of fried pork, the aroma of newly baked bread, the sight of steaming boiled potatoes, would assault my senses and the satisfaction of my appetite would practically dominate my whole being until supper was nearly over.

One evening shortly after our arrival in Morristown, when supper was over Mark and I went down to the river to see if we could find a boat with which we could go rowing. Coming upon a cluster of private boat-houses, we stopped for a moment to watch an old man as he glided up to the community dock in a trim little skiff. As the man in landing looked up and saw us, he held aloft a string of several good-sized fish. "Ain't they nice ones!" he exclaimed with a tone of familiarity before we had time to say a word of appreciation. "You bet! . . . They're swell!"

Mark and I were unaccustomed to having any one whom we did not know speak to us, and this display of neighborliness was as unexpected as it was welcome. For I imagine that we both decided that luck had come into our hands and that here was a friendliness which we could advantageously use to help us in our task of finding a boat for our purpose. But if we were so sure that the man did not know us we were certainly mistaken.

"Say, ain't you two boys the sons o' Amos Holland?"

This was good luck twice over. If this man was so old and kindly looking—yet not too old to enjoy fishing—if

he knew Father, he might even let us take his own boat.

"Yes, we are."

"Well, now I was right, after all. I saw you two fellers movin' in. I live in the house across the road. My name's Captain Wells. . . . As I say, I saw you movin' in and I says to my daughter, 'There's a couple o' Amos Holland's boys or I'll be capsized and foundered!' And she says, 'No such thing.' But I reckon I know chips off the old block when I see 'em."

By this time we were standing on the dock dividing our eager attention between Captain Wells' words, his alluring skiff, and the fine string of fish. "I'm right glad your folks have come back to Morristown. I knew your father well when he was here before . . . a mighty good man, ambitious, honest . . . and, say, how he used to be able to play the bass-horn! . . . Rather fond of the girls too . . . he could of had most any o' them around here, I guess. They seemed kind-a partial to him 'cause he was a teetotaler." The old captain looked at us with a sheepish grin. "He's give me hell plenty for gettin' drunk. He wa'n't one of those sissies, neither. I seen him fight like a damned Injun once when he got mad."

Now seemed the propitious time to ask our question. "Do you know, sir," said Mark, "where my brother and I can get a boat to go rowing in?"

"You're damn' right I do. You can have this one. I'm through with it for the day, and you can have it, fishing tackle 'n all, free o' charge. Do you fish?" Of course we knew all about fishing, but we listened with a grateful show of respect while Captain Wells explained to us how to troll and advised us upon the particular spoon to use.

Three-quarters of an hour later I caught my first pickerel. The excitement of that moment convinced me that despite

everything else I was going to like Morristown. If I couldn't play games at school, and there were no boys who wanted to make a companion of me, I would find my fun at the river, fishing, swimming, rowing and exploring.

But in a few days I was more alone than ever: Mark left home to go to business college. It was no longer fun to go fishing; and to go in swimming without any companions was no more interesting than taking a bath. Meanwhile Ruth, with her warm and genial disposition, had made close friends of the girls across the road. They were together a great deal, talking gaily of dresses and parties, fellows and school. For a while I envied and avoided their jolly company, trying again and in vain to get some of the fellows at school interested in football, and feeling in the egotism of my youth that I must somehow find a way of showing the superiority which belonged to me for having come from the much larger and finer town of Potsdam. But when I would show the boys what I knew to be the best way to kick a football and try to explain to them the very rudiments of formations and team play, they would listen impatiently for a moment and then grab the ball and boot it around in the most unorganized fashion. If they were going to learn football—or indeed if they were going to learn any of the "interesting things which we used to do in Potsdam"—they were determined at least that they were not going to learn them from me. I was discouraged and resentful. In my resentment I remembered an expression which I had heard Doria Sessions' Aunt Jane (who was so fashionable and superior to all these clumsy people in Morristown) make on occasions which seemed to me now very similar to the one I was going through: "This is a bore! . . . such a bore." And so I—not knowing quite what it meant, but dimly feeling that it expressed very wonderfully the

attitude which I hoped the boys and girls of Morristown would realize that I had toward them—went about saying: "This school is such a bore!" or, "This town is such a bore!" or, "This life is such a bore!"

For weeks the expression was my talisman. One afternoon, being kept after school by Miss Darrel to write a theme for English (an assignment which was already several days overdue), I said to her, because she was my favorite teacher, very good-looking, and the one person of all whom I most wanted to impress, "This school is such a bore!"

Miss Darrel looked at me with a strange expression, her hazel eyes sparkling with a curiously affectionate radiation of amusement, sympathy, understanding, and impishness. "That's all very well, young man. But do you actually know what you're saying?"

I did not know why then, but the mantle of pedagogy fell from her shoulders. She became a woman, beautiful, twenty, maternal, and understanding. I suddenly realized, not from what she said, but from the way she said it, that she was accepting me for a moment into a relationship of friendly understanding.

"I certainly do!" I replied with an increased air of importance and magniloquent bravado. "This whole town is a terrible bore!" I walked back to my seat, swaggering with an arrogance I did not feel; and trembling with the hope that here at last in my English teacher I might find some one to truly appreciate me.

"Well, Peter, perhaps it's not the town's fault. Did you ever stop to think that it might be yours? You know, the other students in high school don't find it so dull. A great many of them have a much harder time of it than you do." She was scolding me just like every one else.

My hope was rapidly vanishing. I got out some paper and pretended to write my theme in an effort to cover up my sense of injury. Alas, no one was ever going to understand me.

"Potsdam is a very nice town, isn't it?"

What Miss Darrel was saying was startling enough, but the tone of her voice was even more so. Could it really be that she was trying to tease me—my English teacher who was so severe, and beautiful, and dignified in front of her classes? My heart pounded foolishly. I did not know why, but I felt that if she liked me well enough to take the trouble to tease me, that that was more wonderful than an obvious display of kindness. Still I had to show her that I couldn't be teased—that I was too old for that.

"Yes," I said. (I was talking now with a calm dignity.) "I liked it very much." Not a word more would I say.

"So did I. I lived there for a year, you know, when I went to the Normal. It was very nice; but I think Morristown's nice, too."

". . . You lived there??!"

"Why, yes. Didn't you know it? I knew some of the girls who stayed at your house." Her eyes twinkled merrily as she added: "And they told me you were quite a nice boy, too. . . . I had hopes that you were going to be one of my best scholars."

I suddenly felt sick and miserable. Oh, the bitterness of regret . . . the pain of an opportunity lost! If I had only known that Miss Darrel had lived in Potsdam, I would have shown her before what a wonderful scholar I could be. I would have acted more like a gentleman. But now I was disgraced. It was hopeless to think now of ever being comfortable in Morristown. To all of those unsuspecting people who had listened, so impressed, to my stories of

Potsdam Miss Darrel had now simply to say a few words to brand me as a terrible liar or to expose me as a wicked impostor. I felt so ashamed that I could no longer look at her. I bent over the paper on my desk and under the title of my theme, "The Runaway," I wrote words and words which meant precisely nothing.

"I hope," Miss Darrel was talking again, "I mean I really believe that you can be the best scholar in my Freshman class if you'll just get down to work. Supposing you start right now and see what a nice theme you can write for me."

Holy Moses! She wasn't going to be a traitor to me, after all! She wasn't going to tell! She was still going to give me a chance. I tore up the sheet which I had started, and for five whole minutes I went through the terrific labor of thinking—struggling, concentrating—with my head in my hands. I was desperately trying to conjure up a story which would stamp me at once as a genius.

At the end of my deep thought I wrote again at the top of my clean sheet of paper: "The Runaway." But this story was to be different. In it I was to make myself the hero which I had always wanted to be—the rescuer of Doria Sessions and her mother from the terrible fate of death and mutilation at the hands (or rather, the heels) of a runaway horse. . . . It was a Sunday afternoon, and as Fate would have it I was dressed in my best clothes, shoes brilliantly polished. The horse was wildly, madly galloping up Napoleon Avenue (Elm Street of Potsdam) and I, seeing it coming in the nick of time, dashed out into the road, gave a lunge for its head, seized the bridle, and, after being dragged along for nearly a quarter of a mile, finally stopped it. . . . Standing there by the horse's head, ragged, bruised and bloody, I coolly surveyed the occupants of the carriage

and expressed my hope that they had not been injured . . . etc., etc. . . . until I at length drove them home safely, modestly receiving their tearful thanks.

When I had finished the story—in which I hoped Miss Darrel would recognize some obscure evidence of a latent genius—I walked very deliberately up to her desk, placed it before her and started to leave the room. Tomorrow, when she would have read it, she would call me before her, praise my talent, and turning to the rest of the class she would read it aloud, commenting upon it when she had finished, as "one of the finest examples of Freshman writing which I have ever had the privilege to encounter."

But when I came into the class the next day, after a night of sleeplessness and dreaming upon my imminent recognition, she said, "Good morning," and not another word. My heart had been beating so violently that I could hardly speak. Now it seemed to stop. Oh, the agony of that moment! I had to have some relief. So I kept murmuring to myself: "Perhaps she hasn't read it . . . of course she hasn't read it!" But still I couldn't wholly soothe my discouragement. "Suppose she has read it?" . . . "Well, then maybe she's going to wait until after class to speak to me about it!"

At last, in the vicissitudes of class recitation I forgot the grief of my uncertainty—just as all of us dismiss in a succeeding moment the "unforgettable" wretchedness of our present and "incorrigible" doom. I floated along on a stream of revery—recalling the familiar, kindly tone, the friendly smile, the sympathetic gestures of Miss Darrel of the afternoon before, and seeing in everything she now did in class, every question she asked, every movement, every comment she made, a special meaning whose significance was meant

for me alone. The refuge of my bliss was threatened only when for a moment I would wonder if the smile which she was giving to some other boy in the class was half as sincere as those which she gave to me.

At the close of class I had forgotten that I had hoped but a short while before that she would detain me in order to tell me how greatly she had been impressed by my story. And it was not until I was on my way home after school (thinking self-pityingly of the added chores which I now had to do since Mark had left for business college, and deciding that of the two evils—doing chores and staying after school—the latter was by far the less objectionable) the feeble ray of that unfulfilled hope returned to my consciousness and made me miserable. At least she could have corrected it and handed it back. That was the least she could have done. That's what she's there for, isn't it . . . keep me after school to write it . . . and then not take the trouble to show me my mistakes. . . . If she wanted to keep me after school to write it, I can't see why she shouldn't keep me after school to correct it. The unfairness of older people was appalling. Not only did they fail—with the exception of Mark—to understand you; they always seemed to give you no consideration whatsoever. What was I going home to? To do chores: groom horses, clean out the stable, cut wood, grease the wagon. It would be almost supper time before I got through, and after supper I'd have to study. What did they take me for, anyway—a mule? Didn't they ever expect me to have any fun?

The worst of my misery was not expressed. It came from the deep and uncomfortable suspicion that most of my unhappiness might—as Miss Darrel had said—be my own fault. And such an idea was too terrible to express.

5

The contract for the new hotel had at last been let. Father was to start work at once. The jubilation of the household had rarely ever been so great. If Father stopped cracking jokes to become serious for a moment, and following his cue we hushed our hilarity, he would soon reveal to us that his very seriousness was facetious, and would scold our stupidity with such a "delighted" smile on his face (following the example of his then-reigning idol, Teddy Roosevelt) that my insides would tremble with pleasure.

Yet the relief, the joy, the excitement of the news—magnificent as it was—was no more wonderful to me than the pleasure I felt at these periodic displays of warm humanity in my father. For ever since he had returned from California there had been growing in me a feeling of sadness (whose real nature I now recognized to have been pity), a half-conscious, melancholy worry concerning Father's happiness and welfare. Now that he chastised me no more —perhaps due to my precocious size and to the circumstance that my younger brother, Johnny, occupied most of his attention in that department—the very direct resentment which I had felt toward him on that account had been gradually vanishing. I could not help feeling sorry over the fact that all that he had set out to do in the field of my moral and religious welfare by such strenuous applications of "beech-oil" had actually ended in a miserable failure. I saw myself as a worse case than ever before. It seemed to me that the older I grew, the more sins I learned to indulge in. And knowing that it had been Father's aim to prevent just that, I could not avoid criticizing his blundering attempt. Once having criticized, I could not help feeling sorry for him.

The intrinsic qualities of an idol apparently depreciate when the virtues with which we have originally adorned it begin one by one to vanish from our estimate. So the whole stature of my father had sunk lower and lower in the categories of my esteem, and the spectacle of that decline revealed to me the first glimmerings of tragedy. Thus in my adolescence, though I did not know why, any pleasure which my father could salvage from life to compensate him for the failure of his ambitions (the collapse of his austere eminence) would give me more joy than his orthodox successes. It was as though his decline from the loftiness of deity had provoked in me a hope that he would now support the Devil.

I was glad when my father asked me after supper if I had greased the wagon to be able to tell him that I had. I felt a great satisfaction in having been able to do that much to help him. He must have seen that satisfaction in my face because he in turn seemed to be more pleased than he normally was over the mere performance of one of my regular chores. "If you keep on like this I guess I'll have to hire you to work for me. I could use you Saturdays and afternoons during the week . . . doing some teaming . . . and you could earn a little change." He looked so pleased over the prospect of my working for him: as though he had at last found a son (if only thirteen years old) who might take an interest in his business even though Mathew and Mark, turning to other fields, had gone away from home. While I, happy and eager over the possibilities of this new responsibility, could scarcely sleep from thinking about it.

For days I came home from school early, took care of the horses most assiduously and waited for my chance to go to work. On Saturday it arrived. All day long I drew

dirt from the excavation for the hotel up the steep hill to the next terrace above the one where the new building was to be erected. At first it was very exciting, but in the early part of the afternoon I began to feel sorry for the horses; they seemed to have to work so hard, pulling those heavy loads up the hill, that just looking at them made me feel weary. I would get off the load and push. That made me really tired. Presently it seemed as though the afternoon would never end. I knew that everybody worked until six o'clock and I began to wonder how any one ever stood it—all day long, day after day, shoveling dirt, using a pick-axe, carrying stone, hauling brick, piling lumber, mixing mortar. Why was life so cruel that people had to do that? Holy Moses! It was awful!

At five o'clock Father saw me driving the horse wearily down the hill to get another load. I was slumped down on the wagon seat and the reins hung listlessly in my hands. It seemed as though I had been working, working, driving horses, drawing dirt, for at least a solid week. When I saw anybody walking along the street or standing around watching the progress of the work I thought: "What lucky people they are; they're not working! No doubt about it, the greatest pleasure in life is not to have to work." But then as I noticed my father looking at me I tried to sit up and to look brave. He grinned, but above that grin his eyes were full of sympathy. "Well, son, I guess you'd better take the team home now . . . they've had enough for today, and I guess you have yourself. Haven't you? Besides, by the time you get them unhitched and taken care of it'll be pretty close to six o'clock anyway. . . . Run along now, and don't forget to let 'em cool off before you give 'em much water."

I had intended to go in swimming that evening after

work, but when I finished taking care of the horses I went into the kitchen and sat down on a chair. Mother brought me a slice of freshly baked bread which was still so warm that it melted the butter. I sat there leaning my chair back against the wall, eating my bread and butter, feeling a sense of ease, of restfulness, of satisfaction such as I had never felt before. There was so much happiness in just sitting down, resting; and being contented not to do anything else —not even to wonder, or think, or wish for a different state from the one I was in. Peace. The peace which comes after hard work, the peace which follows strain and struggle.

When I went to school on Monday I felt perfectly willing to hurry home that afternoon, hitch up the team and work on the job until five o'clock. But in English class Miss Darrel asked me if I wouldn't stop a moment after school to go over my theme with her. "At last," I murmured to myself, "she has read it; and now she's going to tell me how wonderful she thinks it is."

The prospect of working that afternoon immediately lost a great deal of its attractiveness. Even when I would stick my hand into my pocket to feel the dollar bill which Father had paid me on Saturday night, I still felt more eager to stay after school.

Miss Darrel looked particularly beautiful that afternoon. She wore a shirtwaist of silk which in itself (a very rare novelty in Morristown in those days) was unbelievably attractive. Her soft brown hair seemed to be smoother and softer and wispier than ever. A new perfume made her seem like a person too precious to touch; it set her so apart from every one else in the whole school. When I came into her room I was so excited that I could feel my heart keep bumping against my ribs. That she smiled and asked me to

take a chair beside her while she explained the criticisms she had made on my theme did not make me any calmer. I sat on the farthest edge of the chair and trembled with self-consciousness, not so much now because I thought she was going to praise me as because of the fact that I was so near her. It was not until she picked up my theme and her manner suddenly changed from warm friendliness to the impersonal air of the classroom teacher that I felt more at ease, though disappointed.

Under the fire of criticism the story which I had written gradually appeared very childish and dull. Presently I was almost ashamed that I had ever handed it in; and as the hopes of my ever becoming a good English scholar were rapidly diminishing I sat staring at Miss Darrel's desk in self-pitying dejection. "It's no use," I sighed. "I'll never learn to write English! I'm absolutely hopeless!"

"Why, Peter, of course you're not hopeless. You've done very well. This is a very good story. The only thing is: you've got to learn to punctuate, to use a period once in a while, and to start a new paragraph when you start a new idea or change your point of view."

Miss Darrel's voice had become personal again and her manner sympathetic. In the midst of her comments she had placed her arm around my shoulders. She turned her face toward me, and tried to get me to look at her. A lump came in my throat and if I had tried to speak I would have burst into tears. Yet I felt so happy that I wanted that moment to continue forever.

In a daze I kept looking at a page of my story which lay on the desk before me, and from the conglomeration of words scrawled in my clumsy hand the name *Dorothy* stood out like a phrase written in raised letters. And suddenly—though my eyes remained open—there appeared be-

tween the sensitive curtain of my retina and the sheet of paper before me a vision of *Doria:* before the white colonial doorway of her house in Potsdam she was standing, looking like a soft yellow rose momentarily and meditatively held in front of a miniature Dorian façade of white marble. And in a flash the vision changed and against the background of the lacy, green elm trees of the Normal School yard she stood once more in her organdie dress with her hair tumbling down her back like waves of glistening cornsilk caught by a golden barrette. I closed my eyes for a second, and in that second time leaped from summer to autumn and along the orchard path behind our old house in Potsdam Doria was hurrying in the pursuit of a kitten —there in the midst of the rich russets of a frosty October her hair was flying in the wind like spun molasses taffy.

When I opened my eyes that hair still appeared before them, but the hair now was definitely brown, and suddenly I realized that Miss Darrel's cheek was touching my lips. My heart went thumping and my knees trembled, but despite everything else my instinct triumphed; I pursed my lips and gently pressed them against her cheek. Miss Darrel's arm slid from my shoulders to around my neck. In another instant her lips were brushing mine—gently at first and then very madly. Then in a flash I felt a stab of pain. She withdrew her arm and suddenly stood up. As I ran my tongue over my lips I felt a wound and tasted blood. Miss Darrel was hurrying toward the door. I sat staring at the paper on the desk. Abruptly she turned and walked slowly back to where I was sitting. "I'm sorry!" she gasped. "You'd better go home now!" As I got up to go she grasped my arm hard and said: "Remember, Peter, I have a great deal of faith in you!"

When I had left the room and closed the door I walked

over to my seat in the main study hall and sat there for several minutes in a glorious daze. I felt myself to be the most important person in the whole world. Absent-mindedly I took a few books from the desk and got up to go home, but instead of going toward the corridor door I walked across the room to Miss Darrel's. I wanted to go back to her! I wanted the feeling which now enveloped me never to end. Just as I reached her door it opened and she came out. I looked at her eagerly and tried to catch her eye, but she hurried past without even giving me a glance. My world of joy vanished from the universe.

At home that evening I could not speak. The single thought which came into my mind I felt instinctively I should not utter. Yet how I wanted to talk to somebody—somebody who would understand! If Mark were only at home! I could talk to him. Whatever he heard in confidence he never repeated, even in secrecy. But now there was no one to whom I could talk.

There was one thing, however, for which I could be thankful. My mother was sure that she understood my silence. I had got home in time to hitch up the team and draw one load of cement, and I had come back from work covered with its fine gray dust. My mother very strangely attributed my glumness to overwork. "Papa," she said, "I don't think it's a good thing at all for him to be liftin' those heavy bags of cement. No wonder he's silent: he's worn out. That's a job for a man. And just 'cause he's big for his age is no reason why he should be doin' a man's work."

Mother was not usually indulgent or oversolicitous in the matter of my work or physical welfare. Oftentimes she would say: "There's two things I'm sure I'll never have to worry about: and that is that Peter will never kill himself

working or get sick from worrying about it. Land sakes alive! I never saw nobody slower to move or who took things easier."

The truth was that she knew I was lazy. Thus it seemed very extraordinary that she should try to excuse me. (I didn't realize then how well she could read me: how clearly she understood that it was not overwork which kept me silent, but something deeper which she did her best to protect.) But the whole afternoon had been so extraordinary that this unusual gesture of Mother's seemed wholly in keeping. Indeed, the only thing about it that bothered me at the moment was that though it quieted the curiosity concerning my silence it made more difficult the problem of how to get out of the house after supper with some other excuse than going for a walk or bedding the horses. If I were so very tired I obviously should not want to do either. Yet nothing seemed more important that evening than to stroll by the house where Miss Darrel lived, to get a glimpse of her.

In the end, after an hour's pretense of studying, I went out the back door with the pretext of going to the "bathroom." It was nearly ten o'clock before I returned home. Mother looked disappointed and Father scolded; but after what had happened that afternoon I knew that such things would no longer be a punishment. My life had become involved in the more serious matters of the world.

CHAPTER X

For days during the early part of the winter the river would be steaming; and then one morning I would awake and going to the window—as was my unvarying habit—to look across to the shores of Canada, now white with their blanket of snow, I would discover that the old St. Lawrence was scaled with ice almost out to the middle. It never seemed to be less than magic that such a large body of water—over a mile and a half wide and so very, very deep—could change overnight from a mass of moving waves to a glassy sheet of immobile ice.

Even now, despite the frequency with which I have seen the gigantic changes of Nature take place, and despite familiarity with the laws which they inevitably follow, there is nothing which strains my credulity more than the faith which I have that they will happen again. In the winter, when the snows are deep, the trees are barren and the rivers mute; how hard it is to imagine that within a few months that frosty whiteness will have changed to a warm green, that those barren twigs will be covered with leaves, that that icy solidity will be a flowing stream. I find it no more difficult to believe that yesterday we were fish and that tomorrow we'll be supermen.

Winter sports on the river thrilled me, but not enough. Besides those hours of skating and coasting there were others painfully empty. Hours dulled with unfulfilled desire—longing for companionship and the excitement of social activity. Those precious moments when some startling, wonderful change of Nature would capture my eye and

envelope me in a misty delight were all too few. They did not help me much in my struggles with algebra; nor did they wholly soothe the sadness caused by Miss Darrel's neglect; and though they would calm my passions for a while those passions would return to rule me, more powerful, more stimulated than before—driving me to paroxysms of forbidden pleasure and leaving me at last in perspiring moods of miserable remorse. My body was growing and my appetites grew with it. I hungered for excitement, for daring, for heroism. Working for my father had grown dull and irksome—a monotonous round of hauling lumber and hardware from the warehouse to the new building. At school I was behind in all my classes except English. I would sit in the study hall staring at the girls—waiting, hoping for those moments when they would cross their legs and unwittingly reveal those habitually concealed parts of their mysterious beings.

Day after day the pathos of Time gave more and more charm to the memories of Potsdam.

At Christmas time a card came from Doria. In answer I wrote her a "long" letter of adoration and woe, filling two sheets of letter-paper—carefully written in ink—with elaborate complaints against the shortcomings of Morristown and ardent protestations of love and loyalty. For weeks I waited for an answer. None ever came. And just as all of us, suffering from neglect, seek to attract in some way the attention we desire, I sought out the most dangerous spots on the river—places where the ice was notoriously treacherous—and called public attention to my bravery by skating across them. Soon I gained the reputation at school of accepting any dare. One day I got up from my seat and strode noisily out of chapel in the midst of prayer. When I returned to school Principal Benson sent for me immediately. Trem-

blingly, fearfully, I walked toward his office. Just as I was about to go in the door Art Barbour—one of the seniors who had dared me to do the flagrant act—brushed by me and whispered: "If he starts to give you hell, tell him you had to go to the toilet." Loudly I answered: "What's the difference? I'll tell him the truth!" With fresh defiance I walked into the principal's office.

Principal Benson taught a class in the Methodist Sunday School and took an active and conspicuous part in all the didactic activities of the village which were respectable. Nothing made him happier than an opportunity to display his education (which in reality was a minute parcel of knowledge wrapped in swathes of misinformation, chauvinism, braggadocio, and solemn bombast). With the girls at school—especially if they were pretty—he was jolly, pragmatic, facetious and pompous. The girls liked him because he was susceptible to their teasing and cajolery; but not very many of them respected him. He was too unreliable. If he happened to be nice one day, the very next he might turn on one with sarcasm, animosity, and fierce punishment.

With few exceptions he was severe and tyrannical toward the boys and took particular delight in embarrassing them individually before other people, a pleasure which he mainly indulged by making very personal criticisms of them in front of the girls. If it so happened that he came to school with his nails freshly manicured he would make it a point to snoop around looking for untidy hands and nails. Spying them he would swoop down spectacularly upon the poor individual who owned them and with a nasty "Ahem!" exclaim: "Mr. Barbour" (or Mr. Chadwick or Mr. Spink or any of the other boys whom he particularly liked to disparage at the moment) "Mr. Barbour, I wish that when

you're in school at least you would try and keep yourself a little more tidy. Your fingernails, now . . . just look at 'em!" In the act of calling attention to poor Barbour's dirty hands he would take great pains to display his own ostentatiously. "I'll bet your mother wouldn't let you go around home looking like that!" Then if his victim showed the proper amount of embarrassment he would leave him to his discomfort and walk away—proudly pleased with himself and chuckling with delight.

As I walked into Principal Benson's office I realized the conspicuousness of the rôle I was playing—for playing I was, showing off for the gratification of my vanity. In the office were Miss Darrel, another teacher, and Floyd Smith, a well-behaved senior. My knees began to tremble.

"Well, Mr. Holland, perhaps you can explain why you have suddenly taken to deliberately walking out of chapel without permission—interrupting one of the most solemn periods of our whole day's work, without even so much as excusing yourself." (Professor Benson always had his defendant thoroughly convicted even before he would begin to ask him questions. With his phenomenal powers of penetration and his unique faculty of prognosis he usually knew "how," "when," "where," and "why" both God and man did everything. One of his most obstinate axioms was that high school boys were heavily endowed with "original sin.") "Come, now! I'll give you exactly one minute to think up some excuse for your indefensible act." He pulled out his watch, looked at it portentously, and then smilingly turned around to see if his audience were properly appreciating his magnificent tactics.

"There ain't any excuse!" I blurted out. "I walked out of chapel 'cause I wanted to!"

This was hardly what Professor Benson had expected.

The smile on his face changed to an expression of deep bewilderment, of flabbergasted incredulity. He coughed nervously and his eyes blinked. For a moment my trembling ceased. Now that my danger was far greater than that of the preceding hour—and the fear I felt was correspondingly intense—my whole being changed to an attitude of reckless abandon. For one brief second I saw myself as a hero and sensed the elation of triumph. Then the principal reached out his heavy hand and seized me by the shoulder. Panic-stricken, I wrenched myself free and ran out the door.

Alas! There is no more to tell of my academic career! I never returned to school again.

During the remainder of those two years in Morristown I worked for Father and went around with girls. One was as unpleasant as the other was difficult. To drive the team from eight in the morning to five at night and take care of the horses after hours made the days seem like months, and the months like centuries. While to be alone with a girl in the evening or on Sunday usually demanded the exercise of very plausible dissimulation—that is, of course, in addition to considerable cooperation.

But it must not be supposed that I ever regretted leaving school—nor on the other hand that the school was greatly disquieted by my departure. Miss Darrel, alone, was excepted. It is curious how certain we are of another's shortcomings when we realize how ridiculously wrong they are in appraising ours. The consciousness of our own perspicacity is still more gratifying if it ingeniously discerns the benightedness of others. Never for a moment did I see Mr. Benson as a creature who had appetites, hopes, and desires like myself, but rather was I sure that he was a tyrant whose consuming passion was to torture his students. On the other hand, Miss Wright who "taught" me Latin, could not con-

ceive of me as an individual who might develop a love for the Classic languages, but must look upon me always as an incorrigible ox whose only pleasure was to resist her teaching.

Since I was now the oldest boy at home my position in the household had gradually undergone the metamorphosis from "the difficult child" stage to that of the wayward son. In the parlor Father would await my multitudinous returns from dark excursions, holding in store for me salvos and volleys of parental explosions and paternal admonitions instead of the erstwhile perennial "beech-oil." It was as if the violent methods of Solomon having failed he was at last resigned to using moral suasion. "Peter, you're on the downward path," he would say. "And if you're not careful you're going to wake up some day and find yourself in a place you won't like a little bit." His voice seemed to be struggling to convey both patience and intimidation, striving for a control it could not attain. "'A fool despiseth his father's instruction: but he that regardeth reproof is prudent. . . . The way of the fool is right in his own eyes: but he that hearkeneth unto counsel is wise.'"

Then if I came in particularly late, that is to say any time between ten-thirty and twelve, Father would be especially exasperated. Seemingly forgetting about Christian forbearance, he would cry: "Confound you, you're goin' to try my patience once too often! I hate like poison to put you in a place where they'll make you act the way you ought to, but I want to tell you if you drive me to it I'll do it! I tell you I'll do it! . . . My boy, my patience is just about worn out with you!"

Toward the end of these harangues my father's voice would have risen from an ill-controlled barytone to a hysterical pitch, terrifying and pitiable. I remember that I

would then decide secretly to mend my ways and cause him no more trouble; not because of the threats he had uttered, but because the spectacle of his fanatical passion had made me feel guilty of driving him mad. That is, I was influenced in the end to try to govern my conduct according to his wishes not because I considered his wishes superior to mine, but because I did not want to hurt his feelings: not from fear and respect but from pity and kindness. And it is thus always that the workable ethics of the world are evolved.

2

During our last summer in Morristown there were—as there had been during previous summers—many visitors at our house. My grandmother would say: "True as you're livin', if you live by the St. Lawrence in the summertime you're bound to have company—more company than you want or know what to do with. Folks you never hear from and have nearly forgotten come to visit you. And they know what they're doin', all right, you can depend on that, for there's no better place in the country to spend the summer than on the old St. Lawrence. But you'll never catch 'em comin' around here in the winter, not by a long shot."

Nevertheless Grandmother was glad to see company. She loved visitors and she loved to see them enjoy themselves. "I think a picnic would be kind o' nice for all these people, Amos," she would say when the house was full of guests. And at seventy she was doing her share to make picnics a success. One never asked if she would be feeling in fit shape to take a boat ride and to eat lunch with cold tea on the shores of the river. Hers was the enthusiasm around which such excursions were built. Once the party was in progress, with the young people in swimming and "having a good

time," she was beaming all over, unpacking the lunch, posing for snapshots, and warning Grandfather, "For conscience' sakes, don't go and eat so many deviled eggs this time and get so sick like you did the last."

One Fourth of July Father came home from Potsdam with a surrey full of company. The hotel had been finished for over a year and since the village trustees had finally decided "not to build a Town Hall just yet" there had been no further work in Morristown. He had had to return to Potsdam to get a job. That year he was building a house for lawyer Cubbs, Potsdam attorney and president of the town board. And though times had been hard and Father had lost money in building the Morristown hotel, under the flattering patronage of lawyer Cubbs (who kept telling him how much Potsdam missed him and how great a mistake he had made in moving away, and how successful he would be if he followed his advice and came back and lived there in Potsdam) he was once more optimistic about the opportunities in the future and the success he would be making in another year.

So it was always with Father. He did not know how to be discouraged. At forty, at fifty and at seventy he accepted failure as a temporary setback: the hand of Providence momentarily chastening him for religious shortcomings—the whole to be assuaged and eliminated by more work and deeper piety, if not in this world, certainly in the next. He was convinced that he had lost money in building the hotel because—like most hotels in those days—the plans and specifications had called for a bar. For a Methodist church-member to build a bar was just about one step removed from directly abetting the Devil.

However, the episode of the hotel was now long past and presumably the sin had been expiated. Father once more

was, as we all would express it, beginning to get on his feet. Hence on this Fourth of July of which I have just written he was the genial host again, bringing home a surrey full of company. True to his character, of course, his guests were all women. I should say girls, for not one in the company was over sixteen. And hence for two days it was not necessary for me to go rowing alone or to hope for a storm, a shipwreck, or a fire to make things exciting. Grandmother—dear Grandmother!—suggested a picnic. A picnic, of course, was the ideal thing. Not only did it take one down to the shores of the river, where one most wanted to be, but it also avoided cluttering up the house. If all of us stayed at home there were enormous meals to prepare, dishes to wash, entertainment to be furnished, and furniture to polish; while playing croquet was the only form of amusement. At the river one could go in swimming, play in the rowboat, run through the woods, build campfires, make improvised rafts, and eat quantities of lunch. And always there was the possibility of some adventure with the girls.

On this particular day and in this last matter I was extraordinarily fortunate. Girls had come to mean so much in my life that if the thoughts of them were not immediately upon the surface of my consciousness they lurked but a little ways beneath, always ready to be summoned by a glimpse of limbs and lips, the swish of a skirt, the odor of lilacs or wild roses, the variegated visions which came before my closed eyes shortly after I had gone to bed at night. So when Father brought home four girls (two cousins and two friends of Ruth's from Potsdam) I was particularly happy.

There was Violet Perry, whom I had not seen since I was very small and whom I had remembered as a gawky,

freckled girl who cried so easily when you teased her. Now her dignity, her reserve, the enticing way in which her freckles decorated the deep valleys of her misty blue eyes, the superior way in which she spoke—all made me very proud that she was my cousin, and fearful that because I hadn't properly appreciated her before she would, if she remembered it now, take revenge by ignoring me. Yet there was something about the kindness of her expression (when she was not trying to be so very dignified) and the abundant yellowness of her hair which suggested that she could never be cruelly unwilling. Moreover, if she were, there was another cousin, Eva Vroman, who, if not as pretty, certainly appeared to be very easy to mold to my wishes. If I were nice to her I might therefore make Violet jealous. Somehow or other, vivid demonstrations of interest such as unmistakable jealousy, or an eagerness to be alone with me in the parlor, behind the barn, in the woods gathering flowers, were necessary in order to convince me that a girl "liked" me or was the least concerned about my feelings for her. Yet, terrible as I felt at that time when I was uncertain of the regard which one girl or another held for me, that very suspense was exciting—and hence alluring. The assurance of their devotion was pleasant enough (though once possessed it was sometimes awkward to know what to do with), but the precariousness of not knowing how they felt was far more provocative. So the elation I felt during the hours succeeding the moment of that Fourth of July afternoon when I kissed Violet and found a responsiveness and a surrender in her lips for which I had not even dared hope, could not compare in richness, agitation or tensity with the tantalizing suspense of the hours preceding it.

We had gone down along the river two miles, to the shores of our old farm, to have our picnic. It was a territory

which I loved and with which I was very familiar. I had fished there often in the early morning and late at night. Among the groves of cedar and hickory which dotted the pasture from the old farmhouse down to the river I had hunted rabbits and elusive partridges. In the log-cabin boathouse on the shore I had frequently sought shelter from fierce downpours of rain and fiercer bands of imagined Indians. Recently the primeval ruggedness of the territory had been polluted by the erection of a "modern" cottage and an elaborate boathouse for housing a motor-boat, a circumstance which I then resented primarily because the occupants of the cottage (who rented the place from Father and came there during the summer) resented my going in swimming without a bathing-suit on.

Fortunately on that day they had gone off to the Thousand Islands. Thus the girls could appropriate the boathouse for a place to undress and change to their bathing-suits. I suggested that they do so, with a very definite purpose; for, being familiar with hidden ways of swimming underwater to the dark recesses of the piers which supported the boathouse and thence, unseen, commanding a view of its interior, I artfully plotted to satisfy my restless and ever-present curiosity to see what girls looked like without their clothes on.

Getting into my bathing-suit in the old log-cabin boathouse I looked out through the crannies between the logs and could see the silver sheen of the river, calm in the warmth of the still July day. Its violet coolness invited me and made me happy. I thought of the girls walking toward the new boathouse to get undressed. The vision of their imagined bodies came before my eyes, floating and swimming like pale ivory nymphs over the surface of the violet water. For a fleeting second I was seized with the desire to

leap out into the river without my bathing-suit on. I wanted to defy the sensibilities of every one about me. But the very thought immediately started me to trembling with fear. My younger brother Johnny came into the cabin to get undressed. I slipped into my bathing-suit and plunged into the water.

Silently swimming along the shore I reached the piers of the precious retreat in which the girls were now getting ready for bathing. Father was walking up through the pasture to the spring to get water for the lemonade: Mother was taking care of baby Jenny; Grandmother was unpacking the lunch; Grandfather had gone off, cane in hand, to search for suitable thorn-apple branches out of which to make more canes. I was unobserved on my watery journey toward forbidden beauty.

In another moment I was opposite one of the crevices in the boards which surrounded the little motor-boat harbor. With heart beating so violently that it seemed it must surely make ripples in the calm water, I slowly, guiltily, raised my head. For some moments I lingered in pleasurable anticipation of the scene which was to appear before me, while into the background of my consciousness a terrifying command kept insinuating itself: "Thou shalt not uncover the nakedness of a woman . . . the nakedness of thy sister . . . thou shalt not uncover."

Presently I lifted my eyes and saw the full contours of a girl's body. My glance touched the smooth, white firmness of her hips, the graceful architecture of her legs as she lightly moved them to slide into her bathing-suit; embraced the subtle swelling of her breasts, swinging with their elastic virginity; and came to rest on the tanned sweetness of her face. Then in recognition of the familiar features I was struck with awe! The girl was my sister Ruth.

I glided away from the crevice in violent consternation. But the chatter and laughter of feminine voices soothed my agitation and I floated back to peer once more at the frieze of beautiful figures. This time my glance fell upon the dark loveliness of one of the other girls. Her name was Elizabeth. Unknowingly she laughed in the adoration of my sight, her eyes sparkling with the pleasure of the faint cooling air on her unclothed body, her small red lips opening joyously over the even pearls of her glistening teeth.

I was startled by the call of my name, coming across the smooth water.

"Peter! Peter! Where are you?"

Johnny had leaped into the river and was looking for me. There was terror in his voice, the terror of a ten-year-old who, not seeing me, thought perhaps that I had been drowned. I wanted to answer him, to reassure him, but fear of discovery was greater than compassion. Quickly I dived under the edge of the boathouse and swam underwater as long as my breath held out. I came to the surface several yards from shore. Johnny's voice was still screeching through the air, alarming everybody into a speculation as to my whereabouts. There were shrieks of hysterical laughter from the girls. Alas, I thought, I have been discovered!

But I hadn't, for Johnny suddenly saw me and stopped his shouting. I learned later that when he had suspected me he, shunning the stigma of tale-bearing more vigorously than any other sin of childhood, had tried to shield me. The voices of the girls had returned to their normal pitch and I swam more swiftly away from their boathouse, tingling all over with a magic excitement, as one who has come from his first baptism of forbidden and sacred beauty.

For the rest of that day and on into the night, after I had gone to bed, the spell of enchantment hung over me. Each

time as those lovely images—now enriched and infinitely varied by the play of my imagination—would reappear upon the curtain of my memory my head would reel with pleasure and my body shiver with sweet pain and yearning. Even the recollection of Violet's kiss grew dim as I thought of those figures standing there on the platform, like a lovely and immortal American frieze waiting to be sculptured for the delectation of coming generations. Naturally I did not then realize why the image of beauty, elusive and unpossessed, returned to me more vividly, more poignantly provoking, than a loveliness already made my own. I had not learned the philosophy of "unfinished pleasure." I was not yet aware that a kiss once taken—a goal once won—loses the magic of infinite anticipation.

On the following Sunday morning the surrey was made ready, and Father started back to Potsdam with the bevy of girls. Now, save for one, they were all apparently my enemies. I had gone from one to another with shameless inconstancy, winning their kisses and then retiring. The "unattainable" Elizabeth had been the last, her dark, proud and prepossessing beauty having resisted conquest until just the evening before. As I watched her leave, a sadness filled my heart. I had been seized at last with an incurable love. I had become inspired with great ambitions, determined to go back to school and make a name for myself. Elizabeth was very brilliant and had talked of going to college. If my life were to have a great tragedy, it would be my inability to marry her.

CHAPTER XI

My mother was an incurable devotee of proverbs and platitudes, sayings and superstitions. If her right ear rang she was bright and happy, awaiting the good news which she knew it foretold. If on another day some curious disturbance in her left ear produced a similar sort of ringing, her expression became downcast and her manner sober: one never knew how serious a portent might be lurking in such a sign. "Pride comes before a fall!" she would say when any of us went about the house boasting of what we could do, or when her sponge cake "fell" in the oven shortly after she had proudly peeked at its promising fluffiness.

During the summer the possibility of "thirteen at table" frequently threatened, and on those particular occasions she considered it very fortunate that Jenny was still a baby, for with small protest and little ado one person could thus be added to or subtracted from the dinner-table as the emergency demanded. (If Jenny was hardly a full "person," in so far as matters of social precedence were concerned, she was at least a numerical entity when it came to outwitting the evil that lurked in "thirteen.")

It often happened that Mother's proverbs would conveniently cancel each other. Thus when Father began to talk of moving again—this time to Ogdensburg—a real city which boasted a population of eighteen thousand, such sayings as "A rolling stone gathers no moss!" or "Nothing ventured, nothing won!" or "Far-away pastures always look green!" or "A new house, a new heart!" applied according

to whether at the moment Mother was washing lamp-chimneys and thinking of the advantages of gaslight in Ogdensburg, or whether she was entertaining the Ladies' Aid and ruminating about the "stuck-up" women who, she had heard, often belonged to city churches. As it became more and more certain that we were to move to Ogdensburg the proverbs in favor of a semi-nomadic existence began to bravely multiply until when the last load was on the wagon and Mother finally settled in the buggy, there was an outbreak of tears and muffled sobbing. The real feeling of her heart was to have its moment of expression, after all.

As for me, there had never before been anything so exciting, so wonderful, so full of promise as living in a city—the city of Ogdensburg. It seemed as though life, tame, ordinary, dull and monotonous, had suddenly changed into an endlessly fascinating round of novelty and adventure. The streetcar which ran from one end of the city to the other guaranteed me a pleasure (whenever I had five cents) which I knew I would never tire of. The joy of going to the moving picture theater was so intensely rich and keen that it needs must be accompanied with the painful feeling of sin. The stores, filled with so many fascinating articles—many of which I had never seen before except in pictures in the Sears and Roebuck catalogue—were glittering emporia of unceasing delight. On Saturday afternoons there were baseball games at the Fair Grounds. On Sunday afternoons even the semi-pious stole off to Sandy Beach, where there was always a crowd of gay people in swimming, picnicking, riding the "shoot-the-chutes," devouring icecream cones, roller-skating, "spooning," taking boat rides, laughing, shouting. To me, they were *living*—living as people in Morristown never did.

Father had traded the farm for a huge brick house, whose magnitude, splendor and pretentious grounds seemed to indicate a richness of living, a height of luxury to which our family could never attain, let alone rightfully belong. There were quarters for servants on the basement floor—and heaven knows we had never had servants and wouldn't have known what to do with them if we had. The lawn was elevated at least three feet above the level of the street and held in its elevation by means of a retaining wall. As though this were not enough to make the place look exclusive, this wall was surmounted with a fence of iron pickets, while around the borders of the lawn there were beds of cultivated flowers, running back to an immense grape arbor elaborately and extravagantly constructed to provide shade and shelter on sunny summer afternoons.

"Why, great God Almighty!" Grandfather would say. "It'll take all of a man's time just to take care of this place! To say nothin' of keepin' it a-goin' or findin' any time to enjoy it."

But I liked the house as I liked Ogdensburg. The big rooms with their high ceilings and lavish woodwork, the brilliant gaslights and marble fireplaces, the arabesque of grillwork, and the big heavy doors, represented to me the paramount forms of grandness and excellence toward which I had aspired since the days I had first known Doria Sessions. It was as though if I couldn't be very grand in myself (and I somehow seemed to keep postponing the process of becoming so indefinitely and in toto) I must call upon the aid of external arts and entrenchments to imbue me with a sense of importance for which I so passionately yearned.

At this time I was floundering around in a base and paltry life of worldly pleasure, putting off all efforts to

pursue serious ambitions always until tomorrow when conditions would be more ideal. When school opened, and in a fever of good intentions, brought on by the memory of dark-eyed Elizabeth, I went the first day to the Ogdensburg Academy to present myself once more for scholastic instruction, I became appalled and embarrassed by the comparative youthfulness of my classmates. I decided that some other time would be better for continuing my education. Then, seeking respite for my embarrassment and self-disgust for not carrying out my intention, I went home, dug up some builder's hardware which Father had stored in the barn, took it over to the junk-dealer and sold it, and went on an excursion to Sandy Beach with the proceeds. The roots of my conduct were imbedded in desire for immediate pleasure with as little effort as possible. When the day at last arrived for a serious reckoning I would give myself over to that not unattractive process of being redeemed and devote myself thereafter to the sober duties of a mature Christian. As long as you're going to be saved—I argued to myself—you might as well be saved from a whole lot.

That the imposing brick "mansion" into which we had moved was situated in a neighborhood which was no longer fashionable, indeed hardly respectable, did not substantially lessen the feeling of pride which it gave me. For though its impressiveness did not place me on speaking terms with sons of flour manufacturers, department store owners, bankers and wholesale coal-dealers, it at least gave me a sense of somewhat more than equality with the young people in our immediate vicinity. Meanwhile Mother was helping—with the eagerness which was ever hers—to aid in the material welfare of the family by taking in boarders and roomers. In the beginning most of the boarders were

girls who worked in the silk factory. "I don't care how they make an honest living," Mother would say, "as long as they're decent and respectable." But while virtue was the essential upon which my mother insisted, I was keenly disappointed because "her girls" were not more fashionable or at least better-looking. Plainness and chastity from the hillsides of Canada and the farms of St. Lawrence County were qualities which I could scarcely appreciate.

Into this plainness a vision of beauty came; and touching a spark to new desires, aroused me from the shallow pleasures of early adolescence and spurred me on to taste the moving and cataclysmic experiences of young manhood. Coming home one evening from the State Hospital, where I had recently got a job as an attendant with the hope of being able to play on the baseball team, the sounds from our piano came vibrating through the parlor windows to meet me as I passed through the iron gate and up the walk to the side door. Since our piano had long been silent it must be company. I wondered excitedly who could be playing. Perhaps Mathew had come home for a visit following his recent marriage in Rochester! A girl friend of Ruth's might have come unexpectedly from Potsdam.

Through the dining-room and on through the sitting-room I hurried, expecting any second to encounter some one who would rush up to me with news such as: "Elizabeth has come for a little visit!" or "Mathew and his wife have just arrived from Rochester!" But no one appeared. I reached the parlor door unannounced, and curious. And then—O marvelous quality of beauty which loads each fresh appearance with a new delight. O truth at once eternal and felicitous—while the apparition on the piano-stool continued her melodic and rhythmic way, unwitting of my

presence, I stared enchanted at her evanescent being. Beneath the linen of her dress there was a special something, magic and alluring, which could not in substantial words be defined. Like a wave of unseen magnetism, infinite and enveloping, emanating from the wavy blackness of her hair, the delicate profile of her face and neck, the fragile grace of her hands as they moved across the keys producing subtle harmonies, it embraced and drenched me with a tenuous spell. At once I fell in love with this girl whom I had never before seen.

It seemed as though I stood there for a long time before she turned around and saw me. It was probably only a few seconds, although all the memories of my past life, ignoble, trivial and empty as it appeared to me before, came rushing through my mind pregnant now with meaning and importance. Just as years before my whole existence had acquired for a few days a real and serious significance, following a kiss which Miss Darrel had given me after an English conference in her classroom in Morristown High School, so once again my inmost nature had discovered the key to the universe, and abstruse ontology contained no more enigmas.

When the girl finally noticed me there was an abrupt hiatus in her playing, as though she had to catch a sudden breath, and when she picked up the composition again after the merest second of faltering there quickly appeared an error here and there in the harmony of her rendition, as though self-consciousness had seized and robbed her of her skill and memory. I could not imagine that such a wonderful person would notice me. I fully expected her to go on playing, ignoring me completely; but, luckily at times, musical compositions have endings, and at last the one she was playing came to its final tonic cadence. She turned

toward me suddenly, her face flaming with the vivid scarlet of embarrassment. Yet her lips were upturned in a curious smile of amusement.

"Please don't let me interrupt you!" I said in my best-mannered voice, for I was eager to let her know that I knew something about politeness. "I hope you'll go on playing. I enjoyed hearing you so much that I couldn't help but just stand here and listen."

She appeared wholly unaware that I had been talking. She stared at me for a moment with extraordinary frankness, her large dark eyes seeming to examine me minutely, her senses preoccupied as though she were unaware of what I had said.

"You're Peter, aren't you?" she finally blurted out, "Your mother told me about you. I'm a new boarder. My name is René Picard."

I had apparently passed her examination successfully, for her smile broadened into a warm, inviting acceptance of my presence. It seemed almost that she was trying to soften her unusual and disarming prepossession. But the effect upon me of her rapidly changing manner was an even greater mystification over the nature of women. In the brief space during which I had known her she had, like an extremely versatile actress, portrayed for my confusion and wonder, fragility and sensitiveness, blushing embarrassment, a bold, defiant candor, and now at last a wholly unexpected friendliness. Indeed, I had not had a whole moment to decide just how to take her.

"You're quite a big boy, for only sixteen years old. Your mother said you were big for your age, but I hadn't expected to see a grown-up man. Really, you know, if it weren't for those innocent eyes of yours I'd take you for a regular man of the world." She laughed slyly, with the assurance of an

omniscient woman. Alas, she must understand how complete was my adoration, tempting and ineluctable as she knew herself to be. Nothing is hidden from her, I thought; she undoubtedly knows the audacious thoughts that have been running through my head as I have stood here letting my gaze leap from her limbs to her lips, and wandering from there to her hair and her hips. Yet as I stammered a word here and there, in reply to her comments and questioning glances, a feeling within me kept gradually growing that she also liked me and was willing to show it.

In my heart at that moment I realized that there was nothing which contributed more to my happiness than that feeling. Though I might be bashful, inarticulate, and awkward, I nevertheless tingled all over with pleasure; and though I had reached that age in this strange mixed affair we call Life when I thought of myself as having got off to a very bad start yet I must needs have hope again in the thought that René Picard liked me. For to youth the fact that another person likes one implies that that person has faith in one. I needed some one to have faith in me.

If you are miserable and wretched, slopping along in a cold wet street, with soaking feet and thoughts suicidal; if you are hopelessly sad and your soul is sunken, weighed with the sense of your own impotence—and then you suddenly spy a silk-clad ankle which lifts your eyes from melancholy depths to dancing hips: a swaying form beneath, perhaps, a bright hued raincoat . . . thence to a dewy face of rosy beauty . . . and eyes that smile approval—then your whole world changes: the sun shines again and life has a purpose. So I felt when this girl in the parlor of our brick house in Ogdensburg smiled at me. And though it was far more pleasant to have the rays of her attention directed

toward me than toward the piano, I asked her again—for the want of something to say as I regained my composure following the elation which had come to me—if she would not go on playing.

"Playing?" she said. "I'd much rather talk. I can play when I'm alone, or when you've gone back to work. What time do you have to go back? Do you like your job down there with all those crazy people? I should think it would be interesting. What are they like?"

Though she did not give me a chance to answer her questions immediately after she asked them, it must not be supposed that they were uttered perfunctorily or wholly for the purpose of putting me at ease. She was curious—intensely so—concerning every question she asked.

I told her of the strange people I encountered at the hospital, who were like apples which are perfect except in one spot; who possessed many fascinating qualities, but lacked the essential one of balance; whose commonest weakness, according to the doctors, was their constant propensity for thinking aloud. I told her of how I was gradually acquiring my old skill in pitching baseball and that I hoped before long to become a regular member of the hospital's baseball team. I told her of how, being sent one day to watch a gang of the patients as they unloaded a carload of coal, I had gone to sleep and had suddenly awakened to find that my charges had vanished. They had heard the twelve o'clock whistle and gone to dinner without me. . . .

I talked on and on. René still listened. Mother came into the parlor and went through the ridiculous formula of introducing us to each other. We talked some more and then René played the piano. After considerable urging she got me to sing. I had wanted to sing all the while, but I had accounted it the proper procedure to consent to such request

with the most modest reluctance. We played and sang until the rest of the boarders complained to Mother that they would like to get to sleep. Then we went out on the side porch, which led into the grape arbor, and sat there talking, inhaling the aphrodisiac odors of an early May evening.

That night I was late in getting back to the hospital. The dormitory was locked at midnight and it was a quarter to one when I arrived. I took off my shoes and climbed up the fire escape. I stepped through an open window into a room occupied by three other attendants. Noiselessly I crossed the floor into the corridor and made my own room without discovery. I lay awake thinking of the girl I had just met; of a feeling which she gave me which I had never experienced before; of the invigorating candor with which she approached all of life; of the astounding manner with which she had made sin appear virtuous; of her big dark eyes and husky voice. I went off to sleep thinking of how I would make myself worthy of her.

2

To this day when spring comes around and with it the immemorial practice of seasonal cleaning, when the carpets are torn up and taken outside for a beating, the woodwork is scrubbed and the floors polished, the yard is raked and the rubbish burned, the closets are aired and fortified against moths, there appears in the atmosphere an intermingling of odors which, passing through that strange olfactory door of my memory, recreates there a vision of baseball.

Ah, baseball! But a word; yet with a world of associations. A velvet green diamond on a sunny May afternoon! An exuberance of bodily energy which one cannot—try as he may—wholly expend! A brand-new baseball with its

gleaming white cover, its aroma and "feel" which make one shiver with delight, its spherical beauty and its irresistible invitation to be thrown through the air, to be smacked resoundingly with a right-balanced bat, to be sailed through the heavens in long graceful trajectories! Ah, the lure and delight in a pungent-smelling catcher's mitt!! The satisfaction of the sound as the ball socks into it! The thrill of elation from a line drive caught and held! The paroxysm of pleasure from a slashing hit when the bases are full! All of those sensations come whisking through my mind—now heightened and colored with the glamour of vicariousness, bathed and embellished with the pathos of Time—when the door of my memory is opened with the scent . . . sometimes, perhaps, of burning dead grass, sometimes again of redolent floor oil which we used in our youth on our newly bought baseballs.

Happy indeed was I when I could play baseball. The game was a glorious floodgate for my animal spirits. With an appreciative grandstand and many opportunities to become an athletic hero it almost wholly promised me emotional fulfilment. That spring I had wonderful opportunities to play baseball. When the weather was fine there was practice every afternoon, the members of the squad being excused from their other duties at the hospital. On Saturday afternoons there was usually a game. Then to be out on the diamond in the warm sunshine, playing the game I loved while other fellows of my age were cooped up in schoolrooms, boning on their Latin and memorizing their English poets—and to be paid for my playing at the rate of forty dollars a month, with room and board—it all seemed more and more to be an unusually lucky circumstance.

Father had gone to Erie, Pennsylvania, to superintend

a construction job, hence I was almost free to do whatever I pleased. Off duty in the evenings, I went up to the city to see René, and the hours with her were crowded with pleasure and enlightenment.

Having for the first time in my life pocket money enough to buy icecream sodas whenever I liked, to take René to the moving pictures, to go to Sandy Beach and excursions up the river, I began to feel at last that I had come into my own. I looked forward to the future with a keen sense of happiness. I meant to make of myself a famous baseball player and thus be able to travel around the country in ease and security with René. Each day on the athletic field I rampaged about with eagerness and energy, despite—on many occasions—having been out very late the evening before. Though my pitching was still wild and mostly a matter of sheer physical strength, it was pleasant to overhear remarks about my speed and my curves. "If he ever calms down and uses his head," the coach would say, "he'll make a great pitcher." For my part, however, I was content at the moment with the gifts which I had and the praise which they brought me. Very comfortably my feeling of self-importance grew, and I awaited my chance to appear in some critical and prominent game.

CHAPTER XII

YES, at sixteen my being was infused with the ambition of becoming a baseball hero. What better path I could have followed at the time, with my aversion to work and the suspended animation of my mind, has not yet been revealed to me. The church had had its chance to make of me a theological student or an anti-saloon league snooper, but had got no farther with the job than to make a conscious sinner. In school I'd been exposed to the sundry arts of pedagogy ostensibly to mold me into a scholar or a bond salesman, but even there the effect was a case of mental dyspepsia. Baseball, alas, was not only the height of my interest, but also, alack, the level of my intelligence.

The day came along with a chance to become a hero. It was the hardest game of the season, which we scarcely hoped to win. The famous "Reds" of Ogdensburg had journeyed down to play us. Rooters from the city and the "less-demented" from the hospital crowded the grandstand. René had come down with Johnny and Ruth, bringing a lunch for a picnic after the game. It seemed more and more true as I glanced at their eager faces in the crowd that events of importance were revolving around me. Glowing with pride and happiness, I decided that I could ask no more of life than such moments as these. I was not even sure that I would get a chance to play in the game, but my confidence consoled me that if I did pitch we would win.

That confidence was shaken with terrifying results when to my tremendous surprise I was selected to start the game.

My knees trembled ungovernably and my heart-beat was vehement, until finally my mind was able to conjure up a vision of Grandmother smiling calmly at danger. For four innings I pitched with the determination of a demon, following assiduously the signals from the coach. Having held the Ogdensburg "Reds" scoreless, my confidence returned in conceited proportions.

The firmament was never brighter nor a June day more glorious. My pride was as buoyant as the light, magic air. Every cheer from the grandstand seemed meant for my ears, which sucked in praise till my head must expand. To strike out as many men as I might happen to wish seemed not very difficult, and attractive. I decided to ignore the coach's signals for a few innings just to prove to myself that I could do as well without him. But to my great consternation plans immediately went wrong: two men got hits whom I had intended to strike out, and I had given a base on balls to a third in my eagerness to fan him. Something was wrong, but I couldn't believe it was I. My bewilderment increased with my incredulity. Three men on base and not a single out!

The next man up was a notably weak batter and the coach signaled: "Force him to hit." But now that I had gone so far in my plight I determined to strike him out if it was the last thing I did. My widest curves grew wider and wilder until presently the batter went to base on balls, forcing a run in—and forcing me out.

I walked toward the bench ingloriously defeated. The coach glared at me with anger and disgust. "I guess ya sprained your wrist so ya couldn't throw nothin' but curves —huh?" His voice was merciless and choking with sarcasm. The state of wretchedness which I entered was abysmal. Not, if you please, because I considered myself

hopeless, but because of the glory I had foolishly lost. For just as the unfailing frustrations of the universe are not nearly so hard to bear as provincial little upsets which might have been avoided, so the thought of lost fame which —save for an error of judgment—would surely have been mine, was far more depressing than any suspicion that I might not, after all, be a great baseball player.

But when, after the game, I had taken a shower and changed my clothes and gone down to the river to join René and my brother and sister in their picnic, and there observed that every one else seemed to be bubbling with joy and insouciance; that Ruth had apparently forgotten there had ever been a ball game; that the sight of René's white linen dress clinging closely to her athletic hips as she bent over the lunch-basket was as ravishing to me as ever— my pulses began to throb with the beat of happiness once more, my wretchedness suddenly vanished like night before a sudden dawn.

This period of rediscovered joy existed until René was gone, and I had gone back to my eight o'clock duty to be alone with my self-accusing thoughts.

So the summer sauntered on, to come at length to those days drawn indelibly in my memory—vivid, beautiful and full of sentient wonder. Father had come home for a few days from Erie, Pennsylvania. Sometime before his arrival I had got into the habit of occasionally staying at home all night instead of going back to the hospital, awakening early in the morning and returning in time for duty. A few times, not heeding my alarm clock, I had been late and threatened with dismissal. When Father heard of this he stormed about such a wicked and wilful practice and threatened to take very drastic steps if I couldn't stop staying up till all hours of the night with girls and begin to

pay attention to business. "After this, the doors of the house are going to be locked at twelve o'clock and you're going back to the hospital."

Once I was with René exhaustion alone could break the spell of her magnetism. No laws, no morals, no parental threats had any power over me in the sovereign domain of her presence. There, momentarily, I was inviolate. Her presence transformed those usually formidable foes of my impulses into their positive, petty proportions. For in the flights of my imagination, in the intoxication of discoveries undreamed, in the first minute squirmings of my powers of ratiocination, she appeared to me as something much greater than a woman. Not that she was at all celestial or unearthly: the mystery of her nature was wholly human; but those human qualities were arranged in such uncommon proportions, with such ineffable design and magnificence, that the fascinating ensemble, though borrowing nothing from Heaven, appeared nevertheless to be superhuman. (A Titaness, I called her many years later—a Titaness in spirit with the fragile body of a girl.)

This Titaness worked in an Ogdensburg department store. Born of French and Scotch parents in a Canadian village just outside of Montreal, she had left home at seventeen to taste "life in the city." In the weeks I had known her she had told me very little of her past life, except indirectly as some immediate experience reminded her of it. I knew that she had studied dancing and worked as a waitress; that she had learned to play the piano and to draw, without a teacher. And beneath the grape arbor on Sunday afternoons when I was off duty she had read to me from a book which I had never heard of before: a volume of verse by a man named Omar Khayyam. That she apparently understood it made her appear more than

ever to be prodigiously wise; for, like playing the piano or drawing pictures, understanding and enjoying poetry signified to me at that time the unmistakable and mysterious mark of a genius. Such superhuman activities were beyond my accomplishment.

I had come up to the city the second night after my father's arrival with the real purpose of spending the evening with René. We would take the ferryboat to Prescott and buy icecream sodas. But shortly after I arrived and my intention was suspected, Mother said to me: "Why, Peter, you're not going out during the few evenings that Papa's here, I hope! Land sakes, I should think you'd have that much respect for your father." Because she said that I suddenly felt guilty and sheepish. I knew if I stayed at home it would be the same old story: Father would talk for a little while about the job down in Erie, ask me embarrassing questions about how I spent my money, and when I last went to church; and at length, after listening to my lies, would go to sleep in his chair—awakening in time to lock the house and send me back to the hospital. And since under these circumstances I was ashamed to ask René to join the family circle it meant that I would go the whole evening long scarcely seeing her. I would have been able to bear such an evening with difficulty, though the thought of the alternative which I would sacrifice made me miserable and angry.

As usual I had not counted on the extraordinariness of René, who, having known Father only two days, understood most of my difficulties. She came downstairs and started to play the piano—not if you please the *Merry Widow* waltzes or gems from the *Chocolate Soldier,* but Methodist hymns! In a moment the atmosphere of the sitting-room changed. Father smiled grudgingly and wan-

dered into the parlor. Presently he was singing bass and beaming all over. When Mother and Ruth had finished washing the dishes they joined us around the piano in a regular Methodist song service. The strains of "How Firm a Foundation," "Love Divine, All Love Excelling," "A Mighty Fortress is Our God," resounded through the old brick house—a primitive and vocal anodyne for pent-up emotions.

At ten o'clock Grandfather, coming home from an evening spent at the Norman House bar, his breath redolent with the odor of brandy and cloves, strode into the parlor. "Let's have 'All Hail the Power of Jesus' Name'!" he cried in a stentorian voice. "There's a hymn for you to put the fear o' God in any sinner!" His eyes had a diabolical twinkle which Father refused to notice. In a few moments the two of them were competing for the thunderous honors of the contra-bass.

In the midst of the commotion Mother motioned me aside, and pressing a dollar in my hand, sent me out to the store for some icecream. The evening at home had assumed the proportions of a party.

The turn of events had so diametrically changed my feelings, disrupting anger and supplanting it with pleasure, that I had vaguely begun to wonder if by serving God in singing His hymns we had not all been rewarded with a visitation of His Grace. This dim speculation made me momentarily uneasy, for though I had not at that time wholly finished with God, I had recently been neglecting Him in a life of indulgence. This sudden happiness, which I could not otherwise account for, must have been sent, I suspected, as a tantalizing reminder of the joy of religion which I had been neglecting.

My most uneasy perplexity was concerned with René.

Was it possible that despite all she had said she might be religious? Had she denied her heritage of Catholicism during all the weeks I had known her out of deference to the faith which I so indifferently embraced?

Outside the night was quiet and heavy with the rich scents of August—of the summer flowers dying and the raspberries ripening, of fall flowers awakening, and sweet-smelling honeysuckle. Before we had finished eating our icecream and cake in the dining-room René and Ruth, taking their collation with them, wandered out on to the side porch to look at the moon. Presently I "guessed" that I would take a little walk; and in a few moments the three of us were leisurely strolling about the lawn.

I found such a sense of happiness in the unexpected flow of events, so relieved in my mind of the obsession of sin which normally accompanied my every pleasure, so full of righteousness from having made Mother and Father happy (I did not for one moment think of my inadvertence in so doing) that I began very consciously to rhapsodize over the "wonders of God's universe." To all my exuberance René said nothing, but gazed at the firmament, smiling enigmatically. Then, after Ruth had gone into the house, her voice broke the night's silence with soft, restrained laughter. "You feel quite religious tonight, don't you?" she observed. Her voice was not mocking, nor critical, nor curious, but rather inflected with a feeling of sympathy.

Suddenly there came over me a mood of unwonted introspection. I wanted to answer her honestly as to the nature of my uncommon sentiments. And though unfamiliar then, of course, with the fascinating labyrinths of psychology, I nevertheless sensed that my rhapsodizing had not been wholly sincere; that is to say, not knowing that its real purpose was to ingratiate myself with a God in

whose existence I had but recently had a renewal of suspicion, I nevertheless realized that it had not come from the bottom of my soul.

So I said to René, in answer to her remark about my religious feeling: "Why, no, not especially; I just feel very grateful."

"Grateful for what?"

"Why, grateful to you for doing what you did this evening!"

She grasped my hand and drew herself close to me. But what might have followed was brusquely interrupted. Father came out on the side porch. "Peter," he called, "isn't it time for you to be starting back?"

My punishment! I have denied my religion, I thought. But I answered: "Yes, I'll be going soon. I have one of the fellow's motorcycles, so I can make it in no time."

"Now, don't go depending too much upon any motorcycle," he scolded. "Get started early! There might something happen to it, and then where'd you be?" And with one last hesitating look toward us he turned reluctantly, as if it were a struggle with his conscience to leave us by ourselves, and walked back into the house.

The light went out in the dining-room and presently through the windows in the front of the house we could see him reading his newspaper. In a few moments he would be asleep in his chair. Then when he awakened he would make his rounds of the house, lock the doors, and go to bed. If the motorcycle didn't happen to be out front when he bestirred himself he would probably conclude that I had started back to the hospital. Jubilantly I announced to René that I had a scheme for fooling him—assuming that she felt as I did about the necessity of staying up later.

When Father awakened, René and I were already down

by the river, sitting on one of the old abandoned docks at the foot of our street, listening to the deep bass whistles of the "lake-boats" as they churned their watery ways up the St. Lawrence, and alternately and intoxicatedly staring at the moon and each other.

But somehow it seemed as though I must always feel guilty. I began to think now of the risks which René was taking. "If we're locked out," I presently assured her, "I can surely crawl in through a window and let you in. Only, I hope Father doesn't try to look in your room." And I added guiltily: "We might go back before twelve, if you'd rather not take a chance."

She was silent, looking thoughtfully at the silver-green water. The prospect of being locked out seemed not to disturb her, as walking through the streets at a late hour at night had not; nor the scandalous possibility of being discovered at such an hour alone with a man. To all of these unorthodox practices she had consented without a protest. But now her silence began to disquiet me, like the disturbing voicelessness of impenetrable darkness.

Mother had once told me that some of the other girls considered René very brazen. She had added, defendingly: "I don't agree with 'em. She's always treated me courteously. I guess all's the trouble, she's got more 'n her share of spunk." I, having been frequently startled at some of the unconventional things that she did and said—such as lifting her skirts above her knees while doing a dance, or discussing camisoles and child-birth in front of me without blushing—had gradually come to suspect, from the example of her indifference to them, that customs and conventions were not always unchangeably sound. Even frankness, which years of churchly upbringing had taught me to distrust, had been made attractive to me by the charm

which René gave to it. Why was she so very reticent now? Was it perhaps that the wisdom of her twenty-one years had suddenly grown weary of unsophisticated youth? Or had the singing of hymns started her pondering deeply over religious problems?

Timidly I asked her: "What are you thinking about? Would you rather go back?" Then suddenly, in a mood of solicitude, I said: "I suppose a girl's got to think of her reputation."

At the word "reputation" she quickly looked up, searching quizzically the expression on my face. Pity and amusement shone in her questioning eyes. "You're a funny boy, Peter," she said at length. "But I like you nevertheless! I feel like a mother to you—like protecting you from your funny notions!"

"Funny notions?" I protested. "What's funny about me?"

"Well, for one thing, you rarely like to show what you really think or feel. . . . I mean, dear, when you're happy you always seem to be trying to discover some reason why you should be sad, and when you're miserable you're forever endeavoring to cover it up with a smile . . . as though you liked it."

"When did I ever do that? I smile when I'm with *you,* don't I . . . and you make me happy."

"Yes, but somehow you can't seem to get rid of the idea that there's something naughty about liking me. Tonight, for instance, when we were singing and I would smile at you, you'd give me a tiny little grin as though you were ashamed to show that you were enjoying yourself. And now that we're down here by the river in such a heavenly moonlight you seem to want to keep thinking of being locked out, or what people will say, or what your father

will think." She paused for a moment and sighed yearningly. "My goodness! to hear me talk you'd think I was a fellow and you were a very nice girl! Of course I'm older, but I don't care about that. What I mean is, that if you're going to enjoy a thing, *enjoy* it; or if you don't like a thing, *hate* it."

Seizing my arm she slid over onto my lap. I refused to look at her, and kept staring down at the water. But she took my face in her hands and laughingly sought my glance.

"Look at me, my great big man, look at me! . . . How do you like to hear your grandmother scold you?"

I had no disposition at that moment to look into the eyes of any one, for I had suddenly become hypnotized by the recognition of a gigantic Truth. The last curtain of concealment had been torn from my soul and I was face to face with the fatuousness of its self-abasement. Doubtless my mind had long been preparing for the discovery and the words which René had uttered, coming at precisely the right moment, had at last revealed, in its complete wondrous form, the eternal necessity for a soul's independence—the final accountability which an individual has toward himself.

René had said: if you want to enjoy a thing, enjoy it! I thought to myself: if you want to do a thing, do it! Don't ask whether God or mankind approve! Dare, then, a little, though you go to Hell for it!

But clear Truth is light which is dangerous to stand in. At first it's intoxicating and then it befuddles; and at length, like the sun, drives mere mortals to shade. So one must not think that the seering effulgence, which I at sixteen had so fortuitously stood in, could thereafter remain

my unobscured beacon. Ludicrous indeed—and tragic—the spectacle, were *youth* withered and seered with the transcendency of Truth.

But that evening, intoxicated, I swore resolutely that henceforth I'd do what my impulses dictated. I'd be done with thinking "if this is sinful" and planning my life so to squeeze into Heaven! Conventions be damned! I'd become independent. Parents and morals could not make a man. And so in that moment of fierce resolution my long-cherished wish was realized, namely: a glorious escape from eternally imposed restraint, the first victory in my desire for individual supremacy. For I suddenly realized that now I was free. The liberty to do anything I wished had at last been achieved simply by unearthing the courage to face the consequences.

And I immediately set out to try my new philosophy.

I told René that she had been right in gaging my conduct, but from that moment her criticism would never be true again. "To begin with," I said, "I'll tell you what I have never had the courage to say before: I'm crazy in love with you and I'd marry you tomorrow. I'm nearly seventeen and if you'd marry me now, I'd have so much ambition that I could accomplish anything you asked me."

Her first reply was to put her arms round my neck very tightly. And in the midst of the pleasure which that reassuring and ever so delightful sort of an answer gave me I pondered the first fruits of my philosophy with satisfaction.

". . . Dear," she was saying, "you're wonderful, wonderful! . . . I know you could do anything that I might ever ask you. . . . You're brave to even think of marrying me at your age. . . . But you know, darling, I really don't want you to marry me—at least now. . . . Someday, perhaps,

when you're a little older, and have met more girls and seen more of the world. . . . But as far as loving you is concerned, I'd marry you tonight. . . . You were so sweet to ask me. . . . It made me tingle all over."

"If you really love me, then why not get married tomorrow?" I protested. "I could get a better job if I went to a big city. Mathew's in Rochester; we could go there and try. You know Bob David, the baseball umpire, told me if I'd get a lot of experience, in a year or so I might be able to get into the State League."

Her expression grew more wistful, and her arms tightened around my neck.

"Don't tempt me, dear!" (She punctuated her words with another embrace.) "If you only knew how I'd love to do it! . . . But I can't! I can't! . . . It's hard to explain." Her smile became roguish and her manner facetious. "I just simply couldn't go robbing a cradle, now could I? . . . You wouldn't want me to do that, now, would you? It wouldn't be fair. You go out and know some other girls first, and then see how you like me."

"Well," I grumbled, "I could hardly have expected you to marry me, anyway. I'm young and don't amount to anything. But, by God, I'll show you that I can! I'll leave Ogdensburg tomorrow! And not come back till I make good!"

CHAPTER XIII

With vehement words I announced my "great" decision. Curiously enough the announcement was as great a surprise to me as it must have been to René, for less than a second before I made it, the idea of leaving Ogdensburg had scarcely entered my mind.

To be sure, I didn't leave on the following day. Decisions still had their practical affairs which needed attending to. But a day later I did set sail from home—embarked on my first independent adventure.

Before I go any further with the telling of my own adventures, I had better set down here what had happened meanwhile to the rest of the Holland family. Ruth, of course, had remained in Ogdensburg, patiently helping Mother with the work of the boarding-house—and good-naturedly taking care of little Jenny who was then nearly five years old. Having had to leave high school before graduating, her great hope now was that she might soon be married.

Johnny was twelve and would be entering the eighth grade in the fall. Having recently joined the Boy Scouts he was absorbed in "Being Prepared"—against Indians, against robbers, against drowning, and snake bites, and finally against all enemies of Home and the Republic.

Mark was married and living in Binghamton. Since

graduating from business school he had been working in a bank and what with a phrenetic, religious and very loquacious wife, an innate generosity, and a bank clerk's salary, his life had become a complicated problem of "making both ends meet" and paying church pledges.

At the same time Mathew had a very different difficulty. Successful in Rochester, he had reached a proud height from which relations with the rest of the family appeared more inconvenient than welcome. Married to a woman with a passion for praise and attention which amounted to madness in periods of frustration, his problem consisted of how to acknowledge his family and still remain on terms of peace with his wife. Meanwhile he worked—teaching school, playing in a theater orchestra, and, during the summer, tooting a cornet in the Municipal Band. When Father, made bold by his success in the city of Erie, had hinted that he might move the family to Rochester, Mathew had been strenuous in advising him against it, rehearsing the difficulties to be encountered in big cities. "Better stay in the small towns," Mathew warned, "with men of your own calibre, and where competition is not so keen and people not so well educated."

Thus far had each member of the Holland family traveled, along diverse roads to their ultimate destinies—thus far when I began my independent struggle away from my home in a stepmother world.

3

On the day following my "great" determination I resigned my job and received fifteen dollars pay. I went back to the city to decide where I would go, what train I would take, and when I would leave. Father was leaving that day to

return to Erie. For some time I entertained the thought of asking him if I could go with him. He could certainly give me a job where he was working. But against such a prospect stood the main purpose of my departure. I must be free from all restraints and authority. If I wanted independence, complete and unconditional, why not begin at once in my struggle to achieve it!

In the end I went down to the Rutland depot to inquire about trains to Montreal. The city now held an added fascination for me, since René had once lived there and had often spoken about it. But before I could enter the station an unforeseen influence suddenly and ineluctably decided my exodus in a different direction. For there at one of the docks, tied up like a captured sea-monster, was a "lake-boat" with all hands on deck getting ready to leave port. I knew not where she was going, but I knew that I wanted to be on her. It would be a fitting beginning for my journey into an unexplored world—the fulfilment of a long-held yearning which till that moment had always seemed too daring, too crowded with thrills to be innocent of evil.

The name of the boat was the S.S. *Crocus*. I went on board and asked for the captain. A tall, wiry man with steel grayish hair answered my inquiries. "Aft on the quarter deck, my lad, there's where you'll find him." But when I found the captain I didn't know what to ask him, and finally had to simply blurt out that I was looking for a job.

"A job?" he exclaimed. "What kind of a job? A sailor, an engineer, a stoker, a quartermaster," (he grinned) "or a cook? What experience have you had?"

"I never done any of those things," I answered, "but I think I could be a sailor. I've been on most every kind of a boat that runs on this river, and I know how to sail."

The captain laughed with very evident amusement. "Ha! my lad," he cried, "so you know how to sail a boat, do you? That's fine! That's fine! But I guess that wouldn't help us very much, for we ain't got a yard o' sail on the boat." Turning around, he pointed to a smokestack. "There! You see! You see that pipe up there? That's the only sail we got; and the only breeze that fills it is coal: dirty black coal, and a hell of a lot of it! How about it now, would you like a job shoveling coal? Fifty dollars a month, twelve hour watches! It's not very much like handling the tiller of a sailboat. What about it, eh?"

"I'll take it," I said. "Where does the boat go?"

"Hold on a minute there! Are you just aiming to go some place? You can't do that, you know. You got to stick with the ship until she comes back to this port."

I protested my innocence of such regulations and told him that I just wanted to work on her until she reached her farthermost port, and then get off.

"So you got the wanderlust, have you! You just want to go sailing. Well, at least you're honest about it. But I'm afraid I can't do anything for you. I'm sorry."

"Thank you, sir," I said, and turned to go, bitterly disappointed. But upon reaching the companionway, he called to me again. "Avast! there lad," he cried laughingly; "heave to a minute, will you!" And walking over in my direction, leaned against the taff-rail and began to examine me with curious intentness. "So you want to go sailing, eh? You look pretty husky, but you don't look very old. How old are you?"

"Nearly seventeen."

"Seventeen, eh! Well, do you know how to fry an egg?"

"Certainly, sir!" I said, wondering what he was driving at.

"Well, then, my lad, I might be able to help you out. I don't know what you're trying to run away from, but I was young once myself. I'll give you a job as third cook, and pay you ten dollars when you leave the ship at Cleveland. You want to see the world? Then maybe that'll do you for a while."

"I'll take it!" I said, thanked him again, and asked when the boat left.

"Tomorrow morning, early. Be on board at eight bells."

After signing the ship's papers I hurried down the ladder, elated beyond all that I could silently bear. Away from the dock, I shouted with excitement. "Cleveland!" I hollered. "A sailor! A sailor! On the Great Lakes!" I felt a great awe at my own unprecedented daring.

But my daring had not yet reached the point of boldness which would enable me to break the news to Father. The main cause of my fear was the probability that, knowing my plans, he would prevent me from following them. Luckily he was leaving that evening and I would have only Mother to deal with. I packed my clothes and made ready to leave. My straw suitcase bulged with things which I thought I would need: raincoat, sneakers, white flannel pants, baseball shoes, gloves, straw hat and sweater, a jackknife and underwear, and, hesitantly, at last, mainly because I did not want Mother to discover that I had left it behind me, a Bible which she had given me on my thirteenth birthday.

With everything ready I could not wait until René returned, but must needs hurry up to the store before she had finished work. Now, thought I, she'll be impressed all right, and sorry enough too that I'm really going to leave. But then, unawares, my mind began to dwell upon the good times I was leaving—the jolly little excursions with

René, the baseball games at the hospital, the hundred pleasant moments, so familiar and taken-for-granted, that until now, knowing I must leave them, had seemed so insignificant. Suddenly I perceived—as all of us must, when we set out on new adventures away from our comfortable and familiar refuges, whether they be refuges of body, mind or spirit—that the real stuff of pioneering is made of something more than fireside dreams and gentle yearning. As suddenly, I determined that from somewhere within me I'd unearth that stuff. So by the time I met René I had acquired a new pride: the pride of a Perseus, unblenching and indomitable.

When Father had gone I made known the news to Mother. At first she pleaded and endeavored to discourage, and at length became sad and tearfully accepted. "Papa's gone," she wept, "and so are Mathew and Mark. It won't be long now before I haven't got no family left. . . ." She wiped her eyes and straightened her face. "But if you think you got to go, I suppose you'd better; but, for heaven's sake, take care of yourself and don't forget to write!"

Thus in effect I said good-by to my mother. Late that evening after lofty farewells and bathetic embracing, I dragged myself from the arms of René, whose pleasures, alas, had been so poignantly heightened by the sad awareness that they must soon be foregone.

4

From the arms of a girl who embodies all loveliness; from beneath a grape arbor on an August night, where the blended scents of femininity and late summer roses fill one's nostrils with odorous delight; from the familiar shadows and friendly sounds of a moon-bathed house which I knew

as home—from these sweet things to a ship's strange forecastle, with its acrid smells and pungent forbiddingness, its unknown faces and repulsive bunks—there was a transition to keep me awake!

And awake I stayed for the rest of the night. The hours passed, but my memories lingered, comparing what I had left with what I had got into: a comparison indeed which sadly depressed me. Aloft on the deck the forecastle watch rang the bell at every half-hour. Two of my shipmates breathed a duet of snores. The dim electric light which hung over by the hatch was the cynosure of eel-flies and hungry mosquitoes. I thought of my bedroom back at the brick house, with the window which looked down on the top of the grape arbor, and of the door into the hallway which I would carefully leave open so that from my position in bed before finally going to sleep I could catch a glimpse of René on her last trip to the bathroom.

The swells from a boat which had just gone down the river were rhythmically lapping our starboard side. The lines which held us fast to the dock were regularly answering with their inhuman wails. A bedbug started a predatory journey up my arm.

A step announced another presence on the deck, and soon the figure of a man appeared in the dim opening. It was just past three o'clock and very dark. "All hands stand by for muster!" cried a voice, whose owner began a noisy clatter with a club against the side of the hatch. Quickly the crew began to bestir themselves. I put on what few clothes I had taken off, went up on deck and reported to the steward. Before the hour was up the propeller was churning, the hawsers were free and we were gliding out into the serene St. Lawrence.

But just as I had started romanticizing to myself while I

leaned over the bulwarks, staring back toward the dock and the rapidly approaching dawn, I was abruptly reminded that I was not a tourist setting out on a lazy voyage, but a member of the crew of a coal-hauling freighter. A tourist, indeed! I was an abysmal third cook! "Ho! there, you dock walloper! Stand by in the galley!" I "stood by" in the galley, washing pots and pans, peeling potatoes and scrubbing vegetables, swabbing the deck and polishing the range, descending into the hold for stores and serving the captain his coffee, waiting on the crew's mess and running errands for the first cook.

Time out of mind they have been sung and written—the lure of the ship, the glory of sailing, the romantic and robust life of the waves, the jolly and rollicking verve of the forecastle. What, then, can I say of the lowliest scullion, who makes things shipshape in a greasy dishpan, who views Castor and Pollux through a grimy porthole! Very little, I fear, of either. In the bowels of the ship, I was at last "a-sailin' " and my thoughts at least were aloft in the foretruck.

There were some moments I could spend on deck, away from the stenches of forecastle and galley. Then I would go foreward and lean over the bow, staring ahead into the foam and the future. Before the close of the first day we were out in Lake Ontario with Cape Vincent behind us and our bow plunging straight into the setting sun! And for a few moments the limpid green of Ontario's waters changed to the red-gold of heaven's fire.

For the first time in my life I was out of sight of land. Face to face with such a momentous experience my heart began to palpitate wildly. With chest heaving in the enchanted air, throat choking with a strange, unaccountable

emotion, fists clenched, muscles tense, I stood erect all set for a fight. But who my assailant would be it was hard to imagine. There was nothing in sight more threatening than the azure sky or the ever-brimming waves which billowed from our side. I was alone on deck and no one was approaching—unless . . . unless perhaps . . . prophetically . . . I was preparing for all the sorrows and vicissitudes of this vain and wilful world. No small task that! And who's to know, when sinew leaves the field, and heart must carry on, or soul, or mind, what woe will then assail us, what new horrors loom above the plunging bow of this wrecked hull you call your life. Oh, Peter! what?

What matter? Up helm! Brace forward! You have seen the decks awash; and more—you've seen those fibrous walls mount in your very ship—incarcerating; leaving no escape save through that fragile exit of the mind: Imagination.

I went below to bank the galley fire, then forward to my springless bunk in the pungent-smelling forecastle.

5

Two nights later the S.S. *Crocus* looped her hawsers round the mooring hooks of a dock in Buffalo. I went ashore piloted by an amiable quartermaster. Krater was his name, a lusty German whose shoreward mission was to "catch" some beer. I'd never drunk. I'd signed the pledge at twelve. In those days the swinging doors could not allure me. (Drinking by itself has no real appeal to youth; but mix it with the seductions of Prohibition: daring, smartness, and a challenge to its right to choose—then you have bewitchment thrice confounded.) I drank that night to keep the quartermaster company. The beer was bitter and went

down very slowly. I chewed sandwiches and pickles in between to take the taste out of my mouth. The quartermaster talked of many things.

"Had a woman, lad?" he asked, with the same casualness which he might have used in saying: "Pass the mustard."

"Not exactly . . . no." I hesitated, hating to admit it, for I momentarily felt that without that accomplishment I could not really say I was a man. I wanted wholly and indubitably to be a man, particularly then, upon the occasion of my first glass of beer and my third day of proud independence.

"No, you say?" he grinned. "Well then, it's time. How 'bout a piece of tail tonight? I'll fix you up . . . I know some sports; good-lookin' too they are. . . . Cost three dollars, but they're worth it."

Attentively I listened, blood afire, my mind a flaming screen of lurid scenes concocted from an ardent imagination. I heard, but yet could not believe that anything so much desired, so unsurpassably exciting, could actually happen to me. The supreme lure! The highest enticement which Sin possessed in its long list of seducements! Offered to me? I could not believe it! The beer was befuddling me.

Still, it was so. We left the saloon, walked a few blocks, then into a hallway next to a second-hand furniture store and up some stairs. The door was opened by an untidy-looking girl, blonde, pudgy, and unctuous. When she recognized the quartermaster she smiled professionally, her brown eyes squinting with a greedy look. He spoke to her familiarly. *"Wie gehts,* Rachel? *Wie gehts* it by you?"

The girl stared at me with a bold appraising eye. I stood very awkwardly, waiting to be introduced.

"A friend of mine from the boat," explained the quartermaster. "Is Edith around?"

"Sure," she answered, and her professional smile broadened. "Come in! Come in!"

Edith was dark, with eyes that had a dull and shallow gleam like dark-brown buttons, hiding a soul of fear. With difficulty she managed a tense, half-hearted smile. "Come with me, honey!" she whined. "I'll show you a good time." The light from the worn-out gas mantle shone on her face and gave it an old and dismal look. The chalky powder could not hide the wrinkles. She reached a scrawny arm mechanically around my waist. Her faded crêpe kimono opened in front. A cloud of sickening perfume choked my nostrils, strenuously overdoing its deodorizing task. She led me into a tawdry, garish bedroom. A moth-eaten banner of Niagara Falls decorated a conspicuous spot in the blotchy wallpaper opposite the bed. The ugly dresser was covered with cheap jewelry and gaudy souvenirs. A dowdy corduroy curtain slovenly hung around a makeshift wardrobe.

A wave of nausea swept over me. An acrid stench of disinfectant, medicinal, carbolic, vied with the cheap perfume for supremacy. Edith released her arm, walked toward the bed, turned and held out her palm. "Got something for me?" she whined, her ghastly voice striving to assume a childish plaintiveness.

I stared, bewildered, trying to avoid those beady eyes. My blood was still aflame, though I could not imagine myself going ahead with the rôle I had contemplated. Revolted and yet cravenly confused I stood there, not knowing what to do.

"Got five dollars, honey?" she whined again.

I reached in my pocket and drew out a bill. She took it greedily, stuck it in her cotton stocking and then began to slip off her kimono.

"You're a nice fellow; not like the lousy guy that was here the other day. When I put my hand out for money, he spit in it. God! did I tell him how to go to hell, though."

Thus I was introduced to the so-called "real thing": that supreme, ineffable experience for which years of Puritan instruction had so perfectly, so inevitably prepared me. I walked back to the ship depressed and heartsick, despising the quartermaster who accompanied me; but most of all loathing myself. "A fine way to start off making good! A swell way to make myself worthy of René!"

But the next morning I awoke feeling strangely refreshed. The S.S. *Crocus* was plowing along through the lingering swells of Lake Erie. The day was clear and serenely blue, with a transparent, soft and feminine air.

As I walked on deck I felt curiously happy. "Perhaps," I said to myself, "it would be all right if the woman were clean and not so terrible-looking." But the feeling of revulsion still remained. It was as though I had thirsted and waited and prepared for a drink at a clear, cool spring and had drunk at last of foul, stinking water. The water had quenched my thirst but the bitter taste remained.

Late the next afternoon we docked in Cleveland. All hands "turned to" to relieve the *Crocus* of her cargo. Supper was late, so the task of making the galley shipshape kept me busy far into the evening. When the work was finally done I willingly stayed on board. Stretching myself supinely on the deck planks of the forwardmost part of the bow, I gazed upward to the innocent sky. The gentle breeze off the lake was cooling and soothing. The lofty firmament spread its blue and star-specked mantle over all, impartially blessing lovers bowered in princely gardens and scullions

bunked on decks of grimy coal-boats. The enchanted air seemed for a moment to dispel the cankerous memory of the night in Buffalo. My mind went roving among the stars, dreaming of the old nights at Potsdam, when first I'd lain enraptured by their infinite, impenetrable mystery. And other nights besides, when in the frosty crystal air I'd stood outside the church on Christmas Eve, looking and looking for that Eastern Star.

For the first time in my life I caught a glimpse of the world as a whole: a very tiny glimpse in the rôle of a spectator.

CHAPTER XIV

THE illumination of Cleveland was much too strong for my rustic eyes. The little I had seen of Buffalo counted for nothing in the way of preparing me for the next breath-taking city. I stood confused, and my judgment completely left me. I craved the splendor of the "city life," and felt the lure of being rich and "sporty." With nearly twenty dollars in the pocket of my white flannel pants, I decided that I could well afford to take a vacation for a couple days before looking for work.

So after I had got a room for three dollars a week I set out assiduously to discover how it felt to live a life of leisure in a strange, big, and brilliant city. The enormous buildings, rich resplendent stores, the magnificent, luxurious hotels of the downtown section, were an unending spectacle of delight to my awe-struck senses. Hour after hour I would wander around the streets, going from one hotel lobby to another, writing glowing letters to René on the Hollenden's stationery, visiting and revisiting department stores. Then, feeling a desire to rest my legs and travel in elegance for a while, I would ride out to one of the parks and back again on one of the big streetcars, which charged the princely fare of three whole cents. In the evening I haunted the moving picture shows, poring over the billboard posters of William Anderson and Florence Turner, John Bunny and Clara Kimball Young. Before a week was up I had spent nearly ten dollars on meals and a "good time." I abruptly realized

that I had better try to find a job. The next day, I decided, I would look for one.

But there were apparently no jobs of any magnificence in Cleveland that September for inexperienced country boys from New York State. If there were I didn't know how to find them. At the end of another week I was washing dishes in a Waldorf Lunch for a dollar a day and meals. Cleveland had gradually become very sordid and forbidding. I wanted to leave it.

Remembering a place called the "Seamen's Union" of which the quartermaster had told me before I left the *Crocus,* I went down there in search of a job. At the address given I ascended a long flight of stairs to a shabby office on the second floor. The room was crowded with sullen, weather-beaten men. I had come there conspicuously arrayed in white flannel trousers, a brand-new starched collar and a showy straw hat. As I walked up to the desk their conversation virtually ceased and too late did I realize my ludicrous appearance. The man at the desk smiled at me derisively. There were hardly any jobs, he told me, even for experienced sailors, to say nothing of school boys who hadn't yet learned to swim.

I walked out of the place burning with shame and disappointment. I had counted so much on getting a job which would take me back East. Down on the street I was suddenly overwhelmed with the sense of my unimportance. There was no one now to whom I could turn for either help or encouragement. A word of friendly conversation, just the smell of Mother's kitchen, or a glimpse of a familiar street-corner in Ogdensburg, would have delighted me so that I would have burst into tears. "God," I said to myself, "what a fool I was ever to leave home! Now, I guess I'll

have to wash dishes in a restaurant until I save enough money to pay my way back . . . and at two dollars a week that'll take me darn near till Christmas." I walked along in a melancholy daze, alternately bedeviling and pitying myself.

Back at the Waldorf a new fellow was working in the kitchen—young, red-headed and jolly; I was eagerly drawn into his congenial conversation. We exchanged confidences concerning our adventures and our backgrounds. Learning that he came from Syracuse, New York, I immediately felt as attached to him as I would have to a relative. He was twenty years old and had left home at seventeen "to escape"—as he put it—"the tyranny of his father." Since then he had been working and traveling from place to place —San Francisco, Chicago, New Orleans, and even Mexico. Except in the winter he had never stayed longer on any one job than to earn sufficient money to travel a little farther. "Not," so he explained, "that I ever donate any of my cash to the railroads. But I save till I get enough to go where I want to, then I blow it all in, having a grand and glorious time. . . . Then I hop a freight and get there just the same! I got in town yesterday from Fort Wayne, Indiana. I'm headed now for Erie, Pennsylvania, 'cause I heard the town was booming."

"Erie?" I exclaimed. "Why, my father is working in Erie! Gee, but I wish I could go along with you!"

"Come along, 'bo! We ought to make it in a day."

"How can I do it?" I asked. "I got only two dollars to my name."

"Boy, you're rich! I got a quarter, and I can make it! Did you never ride the rods?"

"No," I answered, "but I'm willing to try it."

2

My new acquaintance's name was Tim O'Connor. Upon his advice I had spent most of my remaining two dollars in shipping my suitcase to Erie—addressing it to myself, general delivery, not knowing my father's address. Innocently I had changed into a light gray suit and, having no other, I wore my straw hat. Late that evening, after finishing our tour of duty at the Waldorf Lunch, and having eaten as much as we could possibly hold, we took a streetcar to the eastern suburbs of the city. Thence to the New York Central railroad tracks! Eastward into the cloudy night! It was at least two hours before a freight came along, going slowly enough for us to board it. But luckily the one we caught had several empty box-cars and was moving so moderately that we were able to push open the door of one of them and crawl in. Once inside we discovered the luxury of excelsior.

Despite all the excitement I was finally able to go to sleep. But the fears which I had thus far suppressed had their innings in my uneasy dreams.

Whang! bang! crash! The freight had come to a sudden halt. Inside the car the darkness was heavy. A noisy tattoo on the roof told us that it was raining torrents outside. Slowly we felt our way around the wall and pushed open the door. A few dim lights were just visible ahead of us, and through the rain we heard a distant shouting. Tim listened intently for a moment, squeezing my arm.

"I don't know where the hell we are," he said, "but I guess it's a yard and we'd better beat it. Those lights might be bulls, coming down here to look in these empties. . . . I'm taking no chances. . . . Let's go!"

He hopped down to the ground; but I, alarmed at what

the rain would do to my suit and hat, stood in the door of the car hesitating. "It's raining pitchforks," I protested. "Do you think we really have to get out in it?"

Tim snorted. "Rain? Boy!" he rasped. "Rain's a damn sight better than spending thirty days in the hoosegow! Come on! We'll head for that strongest light up the track . . . it may be a station."

It was a station, and under its wide overhanging roof we found protection from the rain—but not until we had both got thoroughly soaked. Standing there in the darkness, shivering with cold, we saw the telltale flashlights making their way up and down the length of the train.

Presently one of them stopped and there was a clamor of violent shouts. Hurriedly the lights congregated and in a few moments they were all making their way toward the station.

"The bulls, all right!" muttered Tim. "And they got their prey, so now we don't have to worry. I pity those poor devils, though. But they should have known better. . . . Come on!"

We started back toward the train, the pitch-darkness forcing us virtually to feel our way. Before we could reach any of the empty box-cars the engine gave a short, staccato whistle and, with a raucous thunder of ear-splitting puffs, started on its way. Now it was as obviously impossible to crawl inside of an empty as it was nearly impossible even to see the train. In desperation we had to clutch at the iron rods at the end of one of the cars, and finally crawl to the top. There, back to back, we sat through the remainder of the night. The rain kept up a heavy downpour and the engine steadily befogged us with its burning, choking smoke. I continued to wear my straw hat.

Just a little before dawn the rain stopped. The sun came

up with a promising warm brilliance. I have never since welcomed it with more eagerness or gratitude. It was like the visit of a friend when one is spending his fifth or sixth month in the ward of a charity hospital—before the cold, wet, indifference of fair-weather companions has been taken for granted, or one has steeled himself to the reality of being forgotten.

In the middle of the forenoon the train slowly rattled and banged into the freight-yard at Erie. Jubilantly we swung off and headed for a restaurant. For the moment it seemed as though Paradise could offer nothing more wonderful than bright September sun and ham and eggs with coffee. The lowly lunch-car in which we ate became a veritable heaven of hospitality and delight. When we had finished eating I could have very willingly lain down on its greasy counter and slept for countless, peaceful hours, without even a worry about my soot-covered gray suit, or a single misgiving over my poor straw hat. I had been so proud of that hat. It had been the bulwark of confidence and the hallmark of my urbanity during those few days of magnificence upon my entrance into Cleveland.

I encountered Father in the most coincidental fashion. After leaving Tim while he looked around for a job, I went to the post-office to get my suitcase. There, to my great surprise, I met Father coming out of the doorway. It was just a little after twelve o'clock. He had come down for his mail at the general delivery window.

If I was surprised he must have been thunderstruck, for he looked squarely at me and failed to recognize me. When I finally spoke, a look of astonishment came into his face sufficient to betray his lack of faith in modern miracles. His eyes, his mouth and his Adam's apple were all agape with

unutterable amazement. It took him nearly a minute to partially recover himself.

"For heaven's sakes, Peter! What—what in the name of mercy have you been doing? Where in the world have you been?"

It was then I fully realized how very bad I must look. When I had first seen Father a very strange feeling had come over me. My throat had begun to tighten with a flood of sudden emotion. I perceived for the first time during all my years of adolescence that despite all resentment I loved him deeply. As I stood there on the post-office steps I looked upon him more welcomely than I ever had done before. So now, at his almost forbidding greeting, becoming suddenly upset and very self-conscious, I answered him facetiously in an attempt at retaliation. "I just rained down," I said, trying very hard to force a smile on my face, though I felt much more like crying.

"Rained down!" he shouted angrily. "I guess you did, all right—and in a cloud of coal dust! How in heaven's name did you ever get in that condition? I'm ashamed of you! Let's get out of here quickly, for I don't want anybody to see me talking to such a looking person on the street."

He motioned me to come with him, and we hurriedly left the vicinity of the post-office.

Several hours later, after having smuggled me into the bathroom of his boarding-house and leaving me in a hurry in order to get back to work, he returned—to discover me asleep in the bathtub. That was more than an already outraged father could possibly stand. Seizing his razor strap he began to swing it viciously at my wet and unclothed body. "I'll teach you, my lad," he cried, "to try and disgrace your father!"

"But, Father!" I protested, while struggling to get hold of the strap. "I just came down here to try to get a job! I rode on a freight-train," I went on to explain (meanwhile successfully disarming him physically), "simply because I didn't have any money."

"It's a prison offense," he shouted, "and I've a good notion to have them put you in jail for it!"

His anger had increased at my refusal to let him go on striking me. But loath to lose entirely his position as paternal dictator, he stepped away from the bathtub and, fixing his fiercest glance upon me, commanded that I be dressed in five minutes and present in his room. "There," as he expressed it, "I'll tend to you! . . . And don't you forget it!"

But the storm blew over. And when I came to him he was apparently a changed man. The next day he got me a job on the building where he was working and before two weeks were up he was showing in many ways—as we walked out in the evening together to a movie or to church —that he was proud of me. "It's a shame," he said once, "that you're such a wild and foolish boy, for you have everything else in your favor. . . . If you'd only settle down and make a Christian man out of yourself."

Shortly after that remark (which was more of a sigh or a prayer than a very optimistic hope) a circumstance came about which must have made him think momentarily that his prayer was going to be answered. One morning his newspaper carried the announcement that the great Billy Sunday was coming to town. Father's eyes lighted up with a glow of anticipation. "There, now," he said, as we walked to work that morning, "we shall have something in Erie that will make the agents of the Devil take counsel with themselves. And this city will be a cleaner, better place in a few weeks, or I miss my guess."

By the time the evangelist arrived my curiosity had been aroused by Father's enthusiasm. Starting out early the first night, so as to be sure to get seats in the huge tabernacle, I felt somewhat the same sensation I had experienced years earlier in attending my first circus.

Outside the doors we joined a mad throng, all curious and eager to see the great miracle-worker. Inside, the tabernacle was decorated gaily with American flags and bunting. The night was unusually warm. The resinous smell of the sawdust mingled with the odor of perspiring humanity. An immense choir made up of the best-looking church girls in town, all chastely dressed in white, impressively occupied a conspicuous place on the platform. A blaring, blatting conglomeration of brass instruments, slightly out of tune in the manner of an augmented Salvation Army band, began to play the first hymn: "Throw Out the Life Line." The huge crowd of nearly eight thousand people lifted their voices in an orgy of shrieking, wailing, howling, bellowing, roaring, moaning, and singing. The net effect was undeniably impressive.

When the congregation had finally sat down the great evangelist entered and walked dramatically to the front center of the platform. Raising his arm grandiloquently, he started to pray: asking the assistance of God in saving "the many sinners in this devil-ridden sink of iniquity. . . . And help us, O God," he prayed, "to close up all the saloons and the dives and the sneaking Sunday theaters . . . and to open up the hearts and the pockets of these people in the great work of making this campaign a huge success." Some more hymns were sung, hymnbooks were offered for sale at a dollar apiece, and then the incomparable Billy Sunday commenced his sermon.

At first his loud voice maintained a fairly even, moderate

tempo. Gradually growing in rapidity and fire, to the accompaniment of weird contortions and wild gestures, it became hysterical, maniacal in pitch and pace. Seizing a chair he smashed it into kindling wood as a gesture of emphasis to the fact that all there assembled were bound straight to hell if they did not give their hearts to Jesus that very night. Off came his coat and vest! Collar! Tie! And finally, his shirt! With bare arms swinging wildly he hopped upon the top of the pulpit! With a frenzy untamed by his precarious position he called down anathema upon the brewery owners, the brothel proprietors and the saloon-keepers, "those foul mouthed, lanterned-jawed sons of iniquity who are dragging this fair city down into the very depths of Hell!"

Down off the pulpit he leaped, fists clenched; and dashing furiously to the very edge of the platform he shrieked like a madman: "Will you people stand by and calmly watch your homes, your children, your dear ones, swept by a conflagration worse than fire? Will you? WILL YOU? . . . Now, now is the time to stop it! . . . Give your heart to Jesus! . . . Come with me now!"

The motley collection of brass instruments began softly to bray: "Jesus, Saviour, Pilot Me."

"Hit the sawdust trail!" he pleaded. "Come forward! Come forward, and acknowledge your sins! Lay your hearts bare before the Saviour!" Then one final threat: "If you don't, I tell you, you're on the road to Hell: burning, agonizing, torturing Hell! . . . And if you don't believe it, I'll prove it to you!"

Crowds of dull-witted people started for the altar. Father turned to look at me triumphantly. But seeing written on my face more curiosity than penitence, his expression

changed to a sad sort of hopefulness. "Are you going up, son?" he asked, pleadingly.

I had been very impressed and had felt considerably moved. My heart had ached and my stomach had been faint. But only during those moments when the evangelist's voice had been sad and plaintive. In the midst of his threats and violent denunciations my mood had changed to an intense defiance. And now at the end of the sermon my defiance had won over my other feelings.

"No!" I retorted. "There are too many sheep up there already."

He eyed me angrily; then, remembering his Christian duty, covered his anger with a sickly smile. "You simply can't get rid of the Devil, can you, son?" he sneered. "But whether you can or not," he went on, with his voice quivering with rage, "I want to tell you one thing: don't you dare blaspheme any more in my presence!" Then, leaving me in my seat, he went up to the altar to be "saved."

After this episode at the tabernacle the atmosphere of congeniality and cooperation which had existed between us for nearly two weeks vanished; and a quarrelsome, grating, suspicious dissension took its place. Each night Father would go to the meetings alone, after having hinted, and asked, and threatened, in his efforts to get me to join him. In the beginning I excused myself with a variety of disgusting lies, but at length I flared up with frank and wounding refusals. But these did not deter him upon his return from rehearsing for my benefit tiresome and irritating accounts of the sermons.

One night in high dudgeon I decided that I'd been a fool and a weakling to ever come to Erie: that in so doing I had defeated the very object of my exodus from home. The

only thing to do now was to leave as soon as possible. The facts: that I had a few dollars in my pocket and would be getting eighteen more on Saturday, and that René had written me that she was leaving Ogdensburg for Syracuse, where she had just succeeded in getting a better job, no doubt influenced me.

I was painfully eager to see René again. Instead of diminishing, the memory of her embraces had seemed to grow more acute during the two months which I had been away from her. Such period of time might be rather short for that vague and indefinite task of making a man out of oneself. I felt very uncertain as to whether anything along that line had been accomplished one way or the other, notwithstanding the very consciously adventurous life I had been living. The time seemed abundantly long enough to assure me of her welcome.

So, remembering—very conveniently—my resolution to follow my impulses and do the things that I wanted to do without worrying about the consequences to myself, I determined that not only would I leave Erie, but I would go to Syracuse despite all the protests of my father. And just as a person, feeling himself unjustly admonished will, in a fit of pique, "be damned" if he doesn't give his reprover something to "really" complain about, I swore to my father that I was parting from his company and that I never expected to see him again until I was twenty-one and married.

But while packing my grip I had all I could do to keep back my tears.

CHAPTER XV

But if at sixteen I thought that I was through with my father until such time as I should become a man—or at least attain to the legal age thereof—I reckoned very little with life's vicissitudes, and not at all with its capriciousness. Indeed, after I had been in Syracuse for a year, living happily with René, working in a factory for $10.00 a week, playing semi-professional baseball, one of those lamentable accidents—often called blessings—overtook me; and suddenly disabusing my confidence of its naive independence, sent me timorously scurrying homeward for paternal assistance. René had become pregnant! So we must get married; and being only seventeen I needed my parents' consent. I would have to go home to Father to ask for it.

Some instinct told me (or perhaps it was the accumulation of another year's experience) that on such a mission, humility and contriteness were far more effective than defiance. So I went to Father and very humbly asked him for his aid and consent.

On this occasion, I am sure, he did not first think of his Christian duty but greeted me warmly from the bottom of his heart. After having accepted me, he very happily bethought himself of the Prodigal Son. "Peter," he said, when he had become fully aware of my predicament, "bring the girl home and let her receive our blessing. You can be married here at the house by the Methodist minister and start your married life off in Christian surroundings. It's a shame that what has happened *has* happened, but in the

end it may be the best thing for you. It may make you settle down and realize the responsibilities of life. But," and then he heaved a long and woeful sigh, ". . . you're only seventeen . . . seventeen years old! And starting off life with a wife and a child! O Peter! Peter! when *will* you give up your wickedness, forsake the Devil and let the Church save you from this awful way you're going!"

Silently, reverently, I had listened, hanging my head in a mood of self-reproach. For once again terrible uneasiness had come over me. Was I being punished, after all, for the sins I had committed, for my lack of faith and failure to attend church? I hadn't for a moment thought that there was no God, but I had hardly believed that He punished one on earth. Even now I couldn't be sure, for an instinct quickened within me to warn me against such a belief. The question remained unanswered, and was soon forgotten, returning to annoy me later when I had got into other difficulties.

That was the way with my religious life. When in hot water I regretted my neglect of it, but when the water had cooled nothing seemed more arduous and useless than the pious confinements of the "straight and narrow path." Not only arduous, but manifestly impossible; more than useless, they were positively absurd.

So after René and I were married, and had made a honeymoon trip out to South Park and back on the streetcar, we had comfortably settled in Rochester (where Father had moved the family that year notwithstanding the warnings of Mathew and the outspoken protests of his wife). The consolations of the Church and the assurances of paternal authority ceased for the time being to have any attractiveness. I had got a job in the Eastman Kodak factory which paid me sixteen dollars a week, and we had

secured a comfortable furnished room with light housekeeping privileges for twenty-four dollars a month. On the weekly balance of ten dollars we managed to "get along." I knew nothing at that time about obstetricians or accouchements. But whatever the expenses to be entailed at the advent of a baby might be, I was sure I could meet them by the time they arrived. According to calculations they were due in May, and a full month before that time—I was confident—I would be playing baseball and adding to my wages.

Meanwhile it was fall and Rochester was beautiful. The gorgeous colors of the leaves along the tree-lined streets even concealed the ugliness of the squalid houses. The famous parks were abloom with flowers, yellow chrysanthemums and wine-red dahlias, golden zinnias and varicolored asters. Markets were overflowing with fruits and produce. The air was redolent with the homey odors of canning tomatoes and spices boiling for appetizing ketchup, peaches stewing for delicious preserves.

The season had opened at the Lyceum Theater and Mathew, playing in the orchestra, invited me to sit in a corner of the pit one night to see a show. René was not invited.

The inside of a legitimate theater had been up to then a mysterious region wholly unexplored by me. In Syracuse René and I had never ventured into them because we had considered them far too expensive. So I looked forward to the experience with tremendous excitement.

The play happened to be *The Round-Up* with Maclyn Arbuckle. What an impression the whole evening made upon me! The melodrama seemed dazzling! Breathtakingly wonderful! My heart pounded madly all the way through it. And the theater itself, with its fascinating sug-

gestions of a life incredibly charming and irresistibly lovely, captivated me completely. I had to walk across the stage to get to the orchestra pit, and the excitement I felt during those moments is hardly describable. The magic enticement of make-up and scenery! The subtle lure of that backstage odor!—perfumes and powders mingling with the fireproof sizing; and, in the case of *The Round-Up,* the smell of horses.

And besides the actors and actresses, who intentionally transported me into a world of make-believe, there were the people out front, who, no less effectively, through no conscious effort I am sure, pictured for my delight a world hardly more real or familiar than that which I saw on the stage. Ladies in evening gowns, the equal of which I had never before seen in real life! Women with beautiful coiffures, and vivid complexions, and soft and elegant accents—a world so different from the drab and pedestrian atmosphere which I had known all my life, that it seemed scarcely to be subject to the same natural laws. From the dark corner of the orchestra pit I looked out upon them, enviously, wonderingly . . . trying to imagine any of the persons whom I had ever known fitting comfortably into such splendor and brilliancy. Doria?—perhaps! Mathew? No! Finally?—no one! It was a world set apart from that which I knew, not only in riches, but in culture and intelligence. A world, unconquerable by ordinary mortals, where conversation was so scintillating, tastes so exquisite, intelligence so subtle, that any one whom I knew would be both speechless and lost in it.

Not until many years later did I meet some of the people from that world. And then—after several courses in skepticism and disillusionment—the revelation that they, after all, were most ordinary creatures, superior in nothing save in

the glamour created by my imagination, distressed me more poignantly than any previous disenchantment. I looked upon those representatives of the world which I had almost wholly imagined, as mountebanks twice guilty, for not only had they not lived the recondite lives which I had ascribed to them, but they had not even dreamed of them.

After the theater Mathew took me to the Odenbach restaurant, and there over our glasses of beer we talked of my "future." Or rather, he talked. I listened—listened with varying feelings of respect and fear and awe and a little resentment at this strange brother of mine who since the years I had lived with him in Potsdam had grown into a person whom I hardly knew. Gently at first he hinted at my shortcomings; then seeming to grow angered at the reminder of their multiplicity he upbraided me very frankly about my ignorance and incorrigibility. "Look at yourself now!" he commanded. "Just look at the mess you are in! Married at seventeen and working in a factory! No education! No training of any sort . . . and precious little chance now of ever improving yourself! What do you suppose is ever going to happen to you? Married, and going to have a baby, when you're hardly able to support yourself! Do you ever stop to think about those things, or don't you even give a damn? My God, boy, if you don't think, or don't do something pretty soon, where are you going to be? Working in a factory and raising a family! You're a disgrace, a disgrace! That's what you are! You haven't any backbone, and not an ounce of pride!"

I stared into the dark-brown depths of my beer and struggled to find an answer to his tirade. But all was confusion and bitterness—the bitterness of beer before it has become palatable—the confusion of life when youth first tastes its bitterness—the bitterness of life when one's im-

pulses fall athwart the patterns of respectability—the disappointment and confusion when the brother to whom one looks for encouragement and help replies with harsh criticism and annihilating predictions. Everything around me seemed suddenly to disappear into the vast penumbra of vague, unfigured things.

But out of the bewilderment some words finally came, quickened by an instinct subtle and hostile, fostered by an antagonism to the pattern of Mathew's life, rooted in a resentment towards an older brother's vaunting success. "Whatever happens to me," I retaliated, "I'm willing to take the consequences."

"*You'll* take the consequences!" he snorted, sarcastically. "*You'll* take them? What do you mean? You haven't even learned to take care of yourself yet! You've run away from everything you've come up against—school, the job in Ogdensburg, the job in Erie, the job in Syracuse! And now you come to Rochester and get married . . . and Father gets you a position at the Eastman Kodak . . . and the Lord only knows how long you'll keep that! Until you get tired of it, I suppose! And then you'll come to me and want me to help you! But, boy, you got another think coming if you think I'm going to have anything to do with you. From now on you're going to get from me just a good letting alone!"

Mathew got up from the table and signaled for the check. His cheeks and eyes were flaming with anger, and he glared at me much as he would have at a skunk.

The joys of earlier in the evening had long ago collapsed —the beauty and excitement of the theater, and the elation I had felt there; the warm glow of happiness which his invitation had given me, the great expectations I had had of his friendship! All gone, all of the encouragement which

his cruel subterfuge had first given me. But the image of that evening had passed into my soul forever.

René had never seemed more wonderful than she was that night, when I came back to our little furnished room, where, uninvited but unprotesting, she had waited so hopefully, so expectantly, for me to return with glowing tales of Mathew's blessings and encouragement. I threw myself on my knees before her and thrust my head into her lap, trying—and succeeding—in keeping the tears from falling. She asked no questions, but she knew what had happened. "You poor kid," she soothed, pressing my head tightly to her body. "Never mind, never mind; they're just trying to break you! . . . But they can't do that, can they? . . . They don't understand you and they're trying to make you over. . . . But you'll show 'em! You'll show 'em that you're Peter Holland and not anybody else."

XVI

So I won a measure of independence from the limitations of Mathew's ideas of what a young man ought to do and be by depending on René. Winter came on and we kept very much to ourselves. At Christmas Johnny brought over a bookrack which he had made in manual training class in high school. Mother followed in the afternoon with little Jenny, carrying cakes and cookies, a knitted jacket for René, clothes for the expected baby, and, as always and forever, her warm, radiant hominess.

Father's wages had been cut to twenty-one dollars a week, hardly enough money for the family to exist on. Ruth was working at Eastman's and getting six dollars a week. And Johnny, in order to earn a little money, was arising at four o'clock every morning to deliver newspapers. In the midst of their various struggles they tried valiantly to make a merry Christmas. As for Mathew, he had become a serious apostle of the modern idea. To him the celebration of Christmas was "just a lot of poppycock," and he considered it the sober duty of his newly acquired atheism to discourage it. To be sure, the theater had given him a turkey and he had accepted it, but they weren't even going to prepare it for Christmas day. Too much bother, what with the matinée and everything—they'd wait until Sunday, when they had more time.

The New Year ushered in a "slight economic depression."

At the Eastman Kodak factories men were being laid

off every day. Wages were sinking, and the winter growing more severe. I lost my job.

Out of sixteen dollars a week we had been able to save nine dollars. After fifteen days of unemployment we had one dollar left. My efforts to get work had all been in vain. One morning I left the house with five cents carfare in my pocket. Our balance of twenty cents René retained for food. Late that afternoon I pawned my five-dollar watch for fifty cents and hurriedly returned to the room for a lunch of graham crackers and milk. Much to my disappointment René was not home, but I expected that she would return at any minute. A whole hour passed and still no sign of René. I went outside again into the cold gray street, and walked up and down, looking for a sight of her, meanwhile trying to stifle a sickening faintness in my stomach.

The old fly-specked clock in the grocery-store which I could see through the little aperture in the frost-covered window as I passed back and forth in front of it, finally registered ten after six. I had at last made a decision. I would go and ask Mathew for help! I must. The situation demanded it. Our money and food were virtually gone. Damn it! . . . I didn't mind starving (but of course I knew I wouldn't—I knew I could get along some way), but how about René? That was a different thing. Pride and independence and everything else could go to hell! She had to be taken care of. Father couldn't help; so Mathew would simply have to. . . .

I started up the street with my head buried in the collar of my overcoat. The air was damp and cold and seemed to penetrate everywhere. But I determined to walk to Mathew's flat just to impress him with the fact that we had no money even for carfare. Then if he loaned me some, I would take a streetcar and be back at the room in an hour. God! if

he would really loan me some money! We could have a hot supper, some soup and some beef stew! . . . It would seem like a banquet . . . and René would be so jubilant! Why, she could make a festive occasion out of a weak cup of tea!

The chill wind swept around the corner with additional fierceness. I lunged forward blindly to take it "head-on." A streetcar had stopped to let off some passengers, and now the wheels were shuddering and grinding against the cold steel rail as it started on its way. A faint voice was calling in the midst of the noise.

"Petey! Petey!"

I finally heard it, and turned to spy René, hurrying to catch up with me.

"Where are you going, dear?" she cried, as she came up to me.

I hated to tell her before my mission was completed. But now that she had seen me I knew that I must. "I'm going over to Mathew's to borrow some money," I said, as calmly as I could, for I wanted her to feel that it was a perfectly simple and natural thing to do.

The smile with which she had greeted me changed to a look of disappointment. "Oh, please don't," she cried.

And then, as though suddenly remembering something pleasant which she had momentarily forgotten, her smile returned. "Dear!" she exclaimed eagerly. "Wait till I tell you! . . . You won't have to go!"

"Why not?" I retorted. "Of course I've got to! We can't just starve."

"Well, we won't have to do that either," she eagerly assured me. "But let's not talk here. Come on back to the room and I'll tell you all about it."

René had got a job!—a job in a shoe factory, at seven

dollars a week! And, as she put it, "I vamped the foreman into paying me daily until you could get work. Wasn't he sweet? Look! He gave me a whole dollar just for working a little while this afternoon!"

That night I pondered the fruits of my impulsiveness: René, pregnant and working in a shoe factory! Me, out of a job and depending upon her for food! And nothing, nothing apparently, that I could do to help it! Oh, God! I must have been born wrong, I thought. Nobody else could possibly cause so much misery when they tried to do the opposite. I didn't want to hurt anybody, or cause any one to suffer—Father or Mathew or God or anybody else! . . . least of all René! And see what had happened. I just couldn't do right! . . . that was the whole trouble! There was just something in me that made me cause evil . . . make people unhappy! I was being punished . . . God was punishing me! . . . O God, O God! help me to do right! . . . I'll do anything You ask me . . . I'll work night and day. . . . I'll go to church . . . I'll give my life.

Ah, that was an idea, to commit suicide! . . . and then I couldn't cause anybody any more trouble! But what would René do? Damn it, I can't leave her! I couldn't! I wouldn't! . . . I'll do something for her! I'll do it, no matter what it takes! . . . I'll steal! By Jesus, I'll rob some of these rich bastards that ride around in big automobiles. I'll do something! . . . I'm not licked yet! . . . I'll show 'em! O God, help me!—if there is a God—I don't want to do anything bad. . . . But I got to help René, no matter what happens. . . .

René snuggled closer to me in bed, and when I moved my arm to put it around her she realized that I was awake. "Oh, Petey, did I wake you?" she whispered huskily.

"No, I been awake."

"What's the matter, sweetheart? Can't you go to sleep? Are you worrying?"

I was silent.

"What are you worrying about . . . hope not about me. You know, I'm going to be much better off doing something. I never did like to sit around here all day, just waiting for you. I'm so glad . . . I wish I'd done it sooner."

She withdrew her hand from beneath the bedclothes and gently began to smooth my forehead. "Go to sleep, darling; everything's going to be swell . . . nothing to worry about . . . go to sleep."

The next morning we were up before seven o'clock. Outside it seemed darker than the middle of the night; inside the gaslight hissed its hideous death-like breath into the gray and ghastly hour—the hour when even the least of humanity deserves the refuge of sleep's forgetfulness—the dismal hour before dawn of a winter morning in the city. René had to be to work at eight. We left the house together.

First there was the newspaper want ads to be gone over—those columns with their perennial and unspeakable annoying "come-ons" for salesmen and agents. . . . Eastman Kodak wants an experienced chemist, preferably a research worker . . . carpenters, bricklayers, plasterers . . . long job, three dollars a day . . . strong man, not afraid of work, handle oil barrels, Vacuum Oil Company.

Ah, there! there's a job I might get.

"Well," said the superintendent, "you're the huskiest-looking fellow that's been around this morning. I think we might give you the job. Ten dollars a week. Pretty good wages for these times, too, I'll tell you. . . . But what made you so late in getting around? You nearly missed out. We

start here at seven, you know. Can you be to work this afternoon? You'll need overalls or old clothes."

I have a job! Boy! Oh, boy! How different the world looks! It's always darkest before the dawn, all right! But what a dawn! More glorious because the darkness had been so intense, as victory is sweetest after the severest strife.

The streetcar could hardly carry me home fast enough. I had decided to go there first, change my clothes, get my overalls, eat a little lunch and then be at the shoe factory promptly at twelve to break the news to René. From there I could get to the oil company's warehouse by one o'clock easily.

On the table in the hall in the rooming-house, I found a package addressed to me in Mathew's handwriting. Rushing up the stairs, I waited until I got into the room to open it, meanwhile wondering excitedly what it could possibly be. And when the wrappers were finally off I stared perplexedly at a large book and a little paper folder. The book's title was, "The Power of Success," and its author's name was Haddock. The folder was entitled "Forging Ahead," and appeared to be an advertisement for a correspondence school.

From seven in the morning until six at night I pushed, rolled, lifted, heaved, and handled heavy barrels of oil in a cold, dank warehouse. At first my muscles ached during the night, and the days seemed weary and never to end. The aches I soon got over, but the weariness became more aggravating. Yet the evenings with René compensated for everything. At the end of a month she gave up her job. And once more I looked toward the future with a certain satisfaction, not quite so naive, but still youthfully confident.

2

It had been arranged that Mother should nurse René through her confinement. And as soon as the event became imminent we were to get larger quarters—two rooms probably, or at least a room and an alcove. I had already talked with some of the managers of the semi-professional baseball teams and they had promised me weekly engagements if I could make good, so I had no doubt that we would be able to afford two rooms easily.

One of the "baseball men" to whom I spoke, Bill O'Donnell, asked me where I was working, and when I told him he seemed very surprised. "You can do better than that," he assured me. And handing me a card with the name and address of a large trucking company on it he said: "Here, take this down there whenever you get the chance, and tell the manager I sent you." A week went by before I was able to see the man.

I took the card over one noon hour and got a job on one of the carting company's trucks. Nothing was said about wages, but at the end of a week's work I discovered eighteen dollars in my pay envelope.

It was the last Saturday in March and unseasonably mild. Nature seemed to be genially compensating for an extraordinarily severe winter, and the memory of the dark cold days which had so nearly overwhelmed us grew dimmer and dimmer in the happiness and good fortune which at last seemed to be ours. Full of the light-heartedness that comes from the release of a long oppression we gaily trotted downtown and bought René a new dress to more suitably clothe her swelling figure. And just as life always becomes colored with a new and unbelievable fascination after a

victory won, that day seemed to be the omen of a spring which would be unprecedently beautiful. We celebrated it by taking chickens, ham and eggs, and flowers over to Mother's for an Easter dinner. In the evening René played the piano and we all sang hymns. That is, all except Johnny, who having just recently started to study 'cello, contributed in lieu of his voice a struggling tenor on his instrument. Every one was so happy that it seemed like old times—those wondrous, distant happy old times in Potsdam, when the Sunday School orchestra used to rehearse in our parlor.

We stayed all night and went to church in the morning—Mother beaming with joy at having so many of her family around her again, all sitting together in the church pew on a glorious Easter Sunday. Poverty might threaten, but her children were well and most of them were near her. She asked no more than that to make her happiness complete.

April came, and with it a baseball tryout. Meanwhile I had been gently "breaking my arm in" during noon hours at work. My muscles felt like steel and it seemed to me as though I had never had better control. At the try-out Mr. O'Donnell appeared to be very favorably impressed. He asked me to report again on the following Saturday. When Saturday arrived he took me out to the International League baseball park, and there, to my amazement, asked me to pitch for some of the batting practice of the Rochester team.

Bewildered and trembling I somehow managed to change to my baseball shoes, slip on a jersey which he handed me and walk out to the pitcher's box. He's got a lot of nerve, I protested to myself, asking me to pitch to these professional players, just to try out for a little semi-professional, home team . . . why, some of these fellows have been in the big leagues! And the Rochester team won the International League pennant last year. It isn't fair . . . and if he hadn't

been so good to me before I'd almost believe he was trying to make a fool out of me.

But faced with the batters my mind concentrated on baseball, and I suddenly became filled with a new eagerness —a tremendous curiosity to see what I could do against veteran players. I started off throwing balls which I knew they could easily hit, and then began to mix in curves which according to my hopes and intentions they ought not to be able to hit. No one was more surprised than I was when many of the batters swung and missed. More batters came out and still I was successful—not always, to be sure, but in a fair number of cases.

Presently Mr. O'Donnell called me over to him and introduced me to a Mr. Hanzel, who, he explained, was one of the Rochester coaches. Mr. Hanzel asked me if I would mind "throwing a few" to him. I eagerly accepted. A little while later he sent me out to the pitcher's box again, this time to pitch to one of the regular Rochester catchers, whose simple signals in regard to the kind of balls I should throw he asked me to follow. Five men came to bat and I struck out three of them; the other two hit balls that would have been easy put-outs.

Again Mr. O'Donnell motioned for me to come over to him. "Say, boy," he said, when I had reached his side, "you got some pretty good stuff there if you want to make use of it. How'd you like to come out here Monday morning and stay for a few days? The Hustlers are opening their season Monday and Mr. Hanzel would like to see some more of you. . . . I'll speak to Sam down at the trucking company and he'll let you off. There might be something for you out here, if you'd like to give it a try. Hanzel likes you, and he knows pitchers. What do you say?"

I was struck dumb with amazement. "What . . . what

. . . what do you mean?" I finally managed to stammer, wondering if it could really be possible that he meant for me to practice with the Hustlers.

He was amused at my surprise. "Why, boy, I mean that Hanzel wants to look you over some more . . . to see how good you are . . . and let the manager see you in action. He thinks in another year, if you get plenty of practice, you might make the Hustler team. Now, how do you like that?"

I couldn't get out of that baseball park fast enough. I ran for the streetcar and raced when I got off it—up two flights of stairs and into René's arms. I squeezed her, lifted her up on my shoulders and carried her around the room; meanwhile conveying to her between excited cries that I might have a chance to play on the Rochester baseball team.

That night we indulged in another celebration: ate at a restaurant and had glasses of wine. The most difficult thing I did throughout the whole evening was to keep myself from going to a telephone and calling up Mathew. Exuberant with joy, I felt that I must tell everybody of my good luck. But René calmed me down and persuaded me to wait at least until Monday.

By the middle of the next week I had signed a contract with the Hustlers. Not for a full season, but up till the middle of June! And for playing baseball! Just for playing the game that I loved I was to receive the incredible fortune of forty-five dollars a week! I did not tell Mathew, but René and I rushed immediately with the news to Mother.

The look on her face I shall never forget.

Since I would be out of town a great deal with the team and since the last few weeks of pregnancy would be precarious ones to spend alone, René went to live with Mother. When I returned to Rochester after my first trip, we went

on an orgy of shopping, buying more things, it seemed, than we had previously purchased in our whole lives: babies' clothing, a carriage, and perfume, and a hot-water bottle, new clothes for ourselves, and a tablecloth for Mother, a tennis racket for Johnny, and a new vase for the piano in the parlor—candy, peanuts, fruit, and some new music.

While I had been away Mathew had heard the news and now he had come down to see me. Full of advice and half beaming with restrained smiles he expressed the hope that I had not taken all that he had said last fall too seriously. Had I read "The Power of Will," he wanted to know. Had I made any plans about saving money? Had I thought of any business that I would like to go into during the winter months when I wouldn't be playing baseball?

To all of his questions I could only answer No, but it pleased me tremendously to realize that he was at least interested. I forgave him in my heart for all that he had said; indeed, I even was willing to think that there was nothing to forgive. And when he invited René and me to have dinner with him the next night down at the lake, explaining that he would hire a car and take us down so that René could make the trip more easily, I was overcome with sadness at the thought that I had ever displeased him.

3

I hadn't yet had a chance to pitch a regular game with the Hustlers. Relief work in two exhibition contests had thus far been my only experience "under fire." In those two games, against easy opposition, I had done very well. Now I was eager—and yet a little fearful—to get a chance in a "real" game. Hanzel had told me that I might be used in Rochester. We were scheduled to be there for eight days

and I had got tickets for René for every game. I was determined that if I did pitch she should be there to see me.

And she was. Toward the end of our stay Montreal, which was trailing in the league, came down for a four-game series, of which Rochester won the first two. Then in the fourth inning of the third game, with both teams scoreless, our pitcher stopped a fierce line drive with his bare hand. The ball bruised his fingers painfully and caused such a contusion on one of them that he had to leave the game. Hanzel, after a brief conference with the manager, asked me to "warm up." At last my chance had arrived! And under the most proud and fortunate circumstances, for not only was René in the grandstand, but Mother and Johnny were there also. Moreover, in a few days I would be eighteen years old.

There was no one out and a man on first base. Crowley, my catcher, signaled for a wide, fast ball in order to catch the runner if he should try to steal second base. I threw the ball, fast and straight, but not quite wide enough. The batter reached out for it and drove a terrific hit into the outfield. Excellent fielding alone prevented the runner from reaching home.

For a moment I stood dazed, not realizing what had hit me, so great was the shock, the shame and disappointment.

The Montreal coaches began an uproar of derision and gibes. My knees began to tremble with the thought of what might happen to me. Two men on base and not a single out! And the first ball I had pitched—hit for a two-bagger!

Crowley walked out to me and told me not to worry. "You'll fan this next guy out easy, kid!" he encouraged. "And then we'll be all set for a nice double play! Take your time now and don't let them birds get your goat!"

Not very often, perhaps, does it happen that the plans

which one makes, whether in the fortuitousness of baseball or the capriciousness of life, unfold themselves precisely according to our intentions. But occasionally they do; and on the strength of those occasions we go on renewing our faith in the magic of concentration. Indeed, sometimes we make a religion out of it. If you think a thing hard enough, we say, you are surely bound to realize it. And: "There is no life, truth, intelligence or substance in matter; all is infinite mind and its infinite manifestation, for . . . etc." And thus do our most fantastic beliefs continue to be born out of coincidence.

And thus also in that critical fourth inning of that seemingly all-important baseball game in Rochester, when by the amazing combination of fickle circumstances, the next batter in front of me struck out, and the following hit into a double play, so great was the impression made upon me, so fervent was my gratitude, that I immediately decided, in the throes of deep emotion, that thenceforth and forever I would place my faith in the power of the mind. And with that decision there came an illusion of progress, selfsatisfying and high-flown—as though I had discovered quite independently the one last truth necessary to insure me of happiness, permanent and inevitable.

However, before the end of the game that "truth" seemed far less infallible than it had at the moment I had discovered it. For after applying all my powers of concentration to the task of hitting a home run, I was chagrined to learn that I could not even *hit* the ball to say nothing of walloping it out of the infield. And though our team finally won the game, all of my mental focusing and straining had not prevented Montreal from scoring four runs though it had been my most determined intention to keep them from scoring.

But the praise I received! The elation I felt, at the end

of that game! In the clubhouse the manager patted me on the back and said, "Nice work! You're going to come along fine." The other members of the team, who had previously ignored me, now smiled sincerely and warmly shook my hand. And when René looked up at me as I met her outside, a new light shone in her eyes and her voice choked with pride, while for the first time in my life Mathew appeared to greet me as an equal. And Johnny, little Johnny! struggling with the recent dignity of his thirteenth birthday, seized my hand speechlessly and hugged it against his cheek. All the way home I heard nothing but praise. Life, I thought, could never again be unhappy.

Nobody recalls that baseball game today except me—after all that praise, and that supreme awareness of feeling that I was a hero. I wonder today as I listen over the radio to the roar of the crowds and the screams of approval if those football fans or baseball fans realize how an athlete feels after he has left the limelight of "heroism"—especially if that blinding light has been of short enough duration that he has not grown tired of it!

"Vanity of vanities . . . all is vanity." When the light has faded it is like the sun gone down. And darkness, anonymity, insignificance and neglect settle down on that man like a black, unending night.

CHAPTER XVII

THAT evening there was more celebration. Johnny brought around three of his school companions after supper, and before it grew dark I had played "catch" with each one of them in turn. People whom I did not know and some whom I had never seen before stopped as they came along the street to congratulate me. Johnny and his companions were very careful to see that no likely baseball fan above the age of ten should pass by without knowing who I was and what I had done that afternoon.

Later that night I could not sleep from the sheer excitement and joy which lingered in my memory. The light of a full moon came pouring in through our window. Weary but happy I lay awake listening to René breathing—counting her breaths and meditating upon the happiness she had brought me.

Then, just as the intoxication of the night was beginning to subside René suddenly awakened with a cry of surprise and lifted herself on her elbow with a startled look on her face.

"What's the matter, darling?" I asked.

"Oh, it's nothing, I guess. I just thought I had a pain."

A little while later she was sure of it, and I went into Mother's room and asked her what to do. In the drowsiness of such a very early awakening Mother still smiled reassuringly, and followed me into our bedroom. She leaned over René and tenderly smoothed her forehead, as though she felt in this hour that René needed more kindness and love

than anything else. Although René was a French Canadian and consequently a "foreigner" whom Mother had hoped I would not marry, she was now to bear her first child, and the first grandchild in the family—away from her own people, her church, her friends, her mother. In Mother's eyes such an event made all others appear insignificant. She began methodically and cheerfully to prepare for it. Along toward morning she sent me for the doctor.

By the time I returned Father had awakened, and was now smiling happily at the prospect of a grandson. Ruth was in the kitchen cheerily getting breakfast, singing over the bubbling oatmeal, glad that for one day, at least, she would not have to go to the factory, but could stay home and help with things in such an atmosphere of expectancy.

The doctor examined René and said: "Well, young man, it will be several hours yet. I'll leave a list of things which you should get and I'll be back around noon."

At ten o'clock I made a hurried trip out to the baseball park and told Hanzel the news. He smiled very warmheartedly and squeezed my hand with friendly grasp. "That's fine, my boy!" he exclaimed. "We'll all congratulate you this evening when it's all over. Now you run right back before that first baseman of yours is born! We won't need you here today. But we're leaving town tonight, you know, and you will have to go along with us." He grinned encouragingly. "Everything will be O.K. by that time, though. Report down at the hotel at six o'clock." As I was leaving he shouted, "Don't forget the cigars!"

When I got back to the house the doctor was there. René's pains had been so frequent and intense that Mother had had to call him before noon. As I was hurrying upstairs to see her an ominous, stifled cry came from the bedroom.

René crying! It hardly seemed possible! The strangeness,

the portentousness, the agony of that voice sent icy shivers down my spine. What a terrible pain it must be, to make René cry out—she who normally suffered the worst torments in silence. I rushed into her room without knocking on the door. The doctor, bending over the bed with vicious-looking forceps in his hands, looked up at me annoyed. "All right," he said; "now that you're in here, you can stay a *few* minutes; but right now this room is no place for a husband."

Mother was holding René's hand and soothing her fevered brow with cologne water. I seized her other hand and kissed her flushed lips. Painfully I felt the need of doing something more. As her fingers dug into mine in the spasms of pain I asked myself: "Why, oh, why can't I share some of her torture—I who am so strong and who have known so little physical pain?" But my question was as futile as it was simple. Those slim fingers again drove themselves excruciatingly into the palm of my hand and perspiration poured from her slender convulsed body. And I was helpless. The doctor motioned for me to go. René protested. "Don't leave me, Peter! Please don't leave me!"

There was an unwonted tone of fear in her voice that struck terror into my whole being. God! Suppose something should happen . . . suppose she should die! Suddenly I knew that despite anything the doctor might say I wouldn't leave her side. The doctor seemed to divine my resolution, for with a look of resignation he proceeded with his brutal instrument—pulling and perspiring with a very human sort of powerlessness. René writhed and very visibly weakened. Presently the doctor laid down his forceps and gave her a hypodermic. Then he looked at me and forced a smile on his face.

"Well, young man," he said, "you're looking kind of pale.

Don't you think you'd better leave the room before I have another patient on my hands?"

"No," I replied; "I shall stay here."

He patted me on the shoulder and went back to his forceps. Mother looked haggard and glanced at me uneasily, but of all of us she concealed best the presentiment that we all felt.

Long before the baby was born its life had silently been despaired of. When it was finally delivered, scarred and inanimate, the ghastly reality was partially mitigated by a certain sense of relief. A short-lived relief, for it immediately became apparent that René was suffering from a very severe hemorrhage. And once again the doctor struggled futilely—this time in an effort to stem the flowing blood.

It was late in the afternoon before he would dare leave her. Calling me aside he spoke with unusual gentleness. "She'll probably pull through," he said, "if nothing else develops. But stick by her," he added, "for she needs you right now. I'm going to my office, and I'll be back in two hours."

When the doctor returned he brought another physician with him. But despite consultations René gradually grew weaker. Her face became more pale and peaceful. When she opened her eyes they were luminous and calm. The doctor had asked her not to talk, but when those beautiful eyes looked at me there was no need of words. They were pouring out their love—before she had to say good-by. Presently she summoned a brave smile and shaped her lips for a kiss. I leaned over and kissed her and she pressed my hand weakly.

Father had come home and I heard him talking to some one out in the hall. Johnny, innocent of the true state of René's condition, began to practice on his 'cello down in the

sitting-room, and then suddenly stopped. Mother got up from her chair at the other side of the bed and went out into the hall. Presently she came back bringing Father along with her. Coming over toward me and putting his arm around my shoulder, he whisperingly asked me if I didn't want him to call the minister. Then, bending over the bed, he kissed René on the forehead.

After he had gone I told René what he had said. She forced another smile to her lips and shook her head. Mother, who had been calm until that moment, finally started to cry, but each fresh sob seemed to be accompanied by a determination that it would be the last. We left the side of the bed for a moment while the doctors again examined her. There was the sound of more footsteps out in the hall and Mother looked apprehensively toward the door. Her crying had stopped now and she calmly asked me if I didn't think René might still get some comfort from a priest. But René again shook her head. Closing her big eyes she seemed to go to sleep. Mother knelt down beside the bed and began to pray.

Hoping that there was a God I, too, started to pray silently. A few moments later René began to choke and I took her in my arms. Weakly her head leaned against my shoulder and she breathed her last breath. I closed my eyes and tried to stop thinking. Presently the doctor came over and patted me on the shoulder.

"Go away!" I exclaimed bitterly. "She doesn't need you any more."

"I know, I know, my son. But in our profession it is always necessary to make a last examination."

I walked into Mother's room and threw myself upon the bed. I could not think. I could only cry. Nothing else mat-

tered! Nothing could have mattered! When Mother came into the room and gently told me to be brave, a feeling came over me almost akin to wonderment—as to who she was and what she was saying. During those recurring seconds in which some instinct would come welling up within me, endeavoring time after time to start me back on the road to emotional equilibrium, my wretchedness would have none of it, but would plunge more hopelessly into unrestrained weeping.

Suddenly I stopped. The tears would come no more! There was momentary relief until a new emotion overpowered me. This time, as before, I was scarcely aware of anything around me. I got up from the bed and walked out into the hall and went downstairs. Though I passed several people they meant nothing to me. I took my hat from the hall rack and went out into the May evening. The street which I had known so well seemed strange and foreign. All the world was remote. I kept on walking. Presently some one came alongside of me and put his arm through mine. I did not even look to see who it was. We walked along silently for a long time, coming at last to Maplewood Park. There the odor of lilacs penetrated my senses and suddenly wrested me from my state of apathy. The memory of the yard in Ogdensburg with its lilac bushes came rushing into my consciousness, and I turned to see who it was who was grasping my arm so affectionately.

It was Mathew! For nearly an hour he had not said a word. Now as we walked along he started to talk about baseball, interrupting but once to say: "I'm sorry, Peter, about what has happened; but no matter what happens we simply must go on."

"I don't want to go on!" I exclaimed bitterly. "I don't give a goddam about going on!"

2

Nevertheless after the funeral I joined the baseball team in Providence. Two days after my return I was knocked out of the pitcher's box during my first inning of relief duty. There followed several games which were equally disastrous. But back in Rochester several weeks later, just before the expiration of my contract, I pitched five innings and our team won the game. However, by the middle of June the manager seemed quite willing to let me go.

Mr. O'Donnell came around and offered me a position on his team, reassuring me that next year I would get another chance with the Hustlers. But suddenly it seemed to me as though I must leave Rochester for a long, long time. The city was filled with phantoms reminding me of René: stores where we had shopped together; the baseball park where on that unforgettable day she had looked up at me with that special glance of pride; the living-room at Mother's house where she had played the piano so gaily—and had lain in a flower-covered casket on a certain May afternoon; the dismal street of our rooming-house along which I would now find myself occasionally walking, for no other purpose than the hope that by so doing I might bring back more vividly the memory of our happy hours there together.

I had to get away from Rochester! A dim instinct echoed within me that life must go on.

It was the middle of June and, like an old friend, undying, loyal and sympathetic, the St. Lawrence beckoned. I hoped that I might find some town near the Thousand Islands where I could get a job on a baseball team.

In the end I took a train for Watertown.

And there, quite magically, I seemed to enter a new world. The town was only a few miles from the St. Law-

rence, somnolent, pleasant, inviting. I went to see the backers of the town baseball team, an unpretentious organization, having a brief summer schedule calling for two games a week (on Saturday and Sunday), and was received with flattering eagerness after I had shown them the newspaper clippings of the games played with Rochester. They hired me, and for a few days I wandered about the beautiful town alone, peacefully and lazily absorbing its summer loveliness. The past gradually vanished into a world apart—a world in which I had once lived but had now put behind me. I wrote to no one. No one back in Rochester knew where I was. The pleasure of playing baseball again became an anodyne of forgetfulness.

After the first two games, which the Watertown team won, and for which I received an undue amount of credit, there were many eager and congenial companions who took it upon themselves to see that I did not suffer from loneliness. Although I received but ten dollars each week, I still had enough money left after paying funeral expenses in Rochester to make it unnecessary for me to get a supplementary job at least for a few weeks. So my days were spent in fishing trips down to Sacketts' Harbor; games and idle talk at the poolroom of the Woodruff House; pleasant evenings at the bar in the Leroy Hotel (where I finally learned to like beer); occasional poker games with some of the town's petty politicians; dances at the Lodge Halls and several indifferent flirtations. The weeks flew by pleasantly enough, though I was conscious of *feeling* very meagerly; life indeed seemed to go by in an insensitive sort of daze.

One Sunday afternoon in the midst of a very difficult game I felt a severe twinge of pain in my left knee which greatly hampered my pitching. Between our innings in the field one of the fellows rubbed it thoroughly with liniment,

but the pain still persisted and I finally had to leave the game.

That evening I went to a dance and became more conscious of the irritation. The next morning I consulted a doctor, who diagnosed the trouble very vaguely as rheumatism, assuring me that exercise would not aggravate it, but adding the warning that dampness and exposure would. Leaving his office I felt considerably better.

But on the following Saturday when I started to warm up for the afternoon game the sharp pain returned, and nothing seemed to alleviate it. After the first inning I reluctantly retired to the bench. The next day was a repetition of the first; and as a result that evening I received no money. Finding myself nearly broke and apparently unable to play baseball for a while, the difficulty of my situation suddenly forced itself into my consciousness, and for the first time in weeks the daze of my pleasant indolence vanished like a charming illusion.

Vanity would not permit me to seek another job in Watertown, where I had, during all those weeks, been more or less an idol of the town sports. But on the other hand not enough money remained to take me very far away. The possibility of borrowing some was equally precluded by my vanity, since I had made no effort to correct the impression—made when I had first come to town—that I possessed all the money I needed. That very evening I accepted an invitation to play poker in order to forestall any suspicion that I had suddenly become broke, and when in the game I had lost all that I had left I excused myself quietly on the pretext that I wanted to go to bed. Back at the hotel I became tangled and dejected in the toils of my dilemma. Not enough money to buy breakfast and a week's hotel bill to pay!

The next morning I was up early and started wandering aimlessly around the public square. A placard, advertising for enlistments in the Marine Corps attracted my attention, suddenly seeming to offer the only solution to my difficulty. I stopped to ask questions of the recruiting sergeant, who luringly convinced me of the charm and excitement of life in the Marines. I was just about to accompany him to his headquarters for an examination when one of my companions of the evening before came along and hailed me. Quickly leaving the sergeant with a promise to return later, I joined my companion, who presently revealed that he was on his way to breakfast. Upon learning that I had not yet eaten he asked me to join him. I accepted very casually, concealing an eagerness I was ashamed of.

During breakfast an inspiration came to me to tell my acquaintance that I was leaving town—". . . going back to Rochester to consult my own doctor about my knee . . ." I glibly explained.

When we had separated I realized that now I *had* to leave town, for within a few hours the news would have spread among the rest of my friends.

It was a morning of strange coincidences. On my way back to see the Marine Corps sergeant I passed by the farmers' sheds, and there on another placard I saw an advertisement for "farm laborers to help with harvesting." And suddenly there flashed upon me the thought that if I could only work for a few weeks and earn some money, my knee might by that time be all right and I could come back to Watertown to finish the season.

I went into the sheds and hired myself out to the first farmer for two dollars a day and board. Then hurrying back to the hotel I quickly packed my suitcase, explaining to the clerk, whom I had grown to know very well, that

I was going to Rochester for a few days' visit and would be back before the end of the week.

The farmer for whom I worked lived about six miles from Watertown. There in seclusion and agony I labored for two weeks. The pain in my knee continued spasmodically; but when it visited me there was no doubt as to its severity. At the end of the two weeks I received twenty-four dollars, packed my suitcase again, caught a ride over to Adams and took a train to Buffalo. I had planned vaguely to get some sort of a job there, and to visit a doctor as soon as possible.

CHAPTER XVIII

BUFFALO was a hideous city that winter—a city of gloomy clouds and black coal-smoke, of dismal furnished rooms and men out of work, of weekly visits to a doctor and of pain not only unalleviated but spreading into my other knee and finally into my ankles.

My first jobs were in the kitchens of restaurants. I graduated at length into the long hours of agony of being a streetcar conductor, limping through crowded cars collecting fares . . . wondering self-accusingly if God was punishing me for my sins.

Weary at night, the pain in my knees would still awaken me; and in the daze of first awakening I would wonder where René was. . . . Why wasn't she in bed with me? . . . where had she gone? . . . at first not believing that she would not soon be back in my arms. And then the shock of realization! . . . My stomach seemed filled with lead, and cold perspiration poured out of my body. The lurid stale air of the furnished room was permeated with bitterness and depression. It was impossible to cry, for there was not a soul to give me sympathy. Tomorrow, I would say to myself, I'll take the first train back to Rochester.

But with the next day there came work, and a fresh determination to stick it out a little longer.

One evening I went into a restaurant where I had never been before. As I entered the door a waitress flashed by me, leaving only time for a glimpse at her profile. My heart beat wildly and for a second I was breathless! In that

instant of her passing I had caught a fleeting suggestion of René! Bewildered, I stood there waiting for her to come into view again. And when she did, I followed her and sat down at her table. Upon closer scrutiny the illusion quickly vanished, but a certain magic still attached itself to the girl, and a mad, irresistible desire impelled me to talk to her. When she came up to take my order I spoke to her bluntly. "When you get through work," I said, "will you go to a movie with me?"

"I'm sorry, but I couldn't," she answered, with a cool politeness which discouraged any further entreaty.

Throughout the rest of the meal I kept staring at her, hoping that she might see in my countenance, or divine from some sort of mental telepathy, the yearning which I had, just to talk to her a while . . . the need in my loneliness to tell some one my troubles. But if she looked at me at all it was with a queer sort of expression as though she thought that I was half mad. Oh, why, I complained mentally, can't she understand what I want! If I could only explain to her that she has reminded me of René!

Feeling more depressed than ever I reluctantly left the restaurant and wandered "home" to my furnished room. Along the dark gray street a prostitute accosted me. Hungrily I stood, listening to her professional words of love.

"Come along, honey, and I'll give you a good time."

I stared at her wonderingly and then gently asked her if she would come to my room.

"Not on your life, dearie; I couldn't do that."

"But I'm lonesome," I said. "I just want some one to talk to."

In the murky light from the street-lamp I tried hard to look into her face, to see if there were any sign of sympathy.

But her eyes seemed opaque and her countenance quite expressionless, giving a general impression of damp, coarse hair, and a horrible streak of red across a bluishly powdered face.

I tried to explain to her: "You see, my wife died a few months ago, and it's terribly lonely without her. I don't know a soul in the city. . . . I'll pay you just the same," I pleaded, "if you'll only come up to my room."

Her eyes surveyed me coldly and her voice suddenly became hard. "Say, what do you take me for? Do you think I look that dumb?" And backing away from me she hurried timorously down the street.

2

The doctor finally warned me that I would have to stay off my feet for a while. "Haven't you got some place you could go for a couple months, until this irritation goes out of your joints?" he asked.

That was the excuse I had been looking for for so long. Weary of fighting, struggling against I knew not what, I had wanted to go back to Rochester, but had been waiting for some authority, higher than that of my own desire, that would impel me to go—an authority which would serve as an excuse for my wishes, and thereby absolve me from the feeling that I had given in to a weakness. For somewhere, in the dimmest regions of my consciousness, the notion had again possessed me that all the disasters which had been pouring down upon my life were the result of that arrogant resolution made on that evening in Ogdensburg: the resolution to do whatever I wished and willingly take the consequences. Now, having found the consequences so bitter,

I had at last become eager to capitulate. The craven philosophy of religious penitence had again laid hold of me, and I must look for other excuses than my wishes to justify every action.

CHAPTER XIX

Arriving in Rochester late one night I found that the family had moved, and having no idea of their new address, and feeling completely exhausted from the increasing insistence of the pain in my knees, I went to a cheap hotel and slept until noon the next day. When, after many inquiries I finally found my parents running a shabby restaurant on Exchange Street, I listened to a recital of poverty and discouragement. Father had lost his job many months before. Mathew had taken Johnny to live with him in order that he might be able to continue in school. Ruth was waiting on table in the restaurant, while Mother was working in the kitchen. Father, who had spent his lifetime outdoors in the free and ennobling activities of farming and building, had been forced by poverty to put on a white apron and stand in virtual confinement behind a scurvy lunch-counter. Somehow all of them were just managing to make a living and to keep little Jenny in school.

And I had come into the midst of such a scene crippled with rheumatism, looking for help, expecting to stay with Mother and Father—to live on them until my knees got better!

Yet Mother welcomed me and tried to keep me in bed. Father listened sympathetically to my difficulties and sent me to a doctor. And when the doctor recommended an operation he took me to the hospital.

Father had gone and the nurse had finally left me. I was alone. Alone in a small white room which smelled

rather comfortingly at first of reassuring antiseptics—an odor so pregnant of promises and miracles to the innocent. The room was bare and depressingly chaste, and the quietness that surrounded it seemed to accentuate my isolation from the rest of the world. The pain, as though suddenly embodied with human intelligence, began to relent in its severity in the face of an imminent operation. (Perhaps my mental suffering had forced it into the background.) Thoughts kept gnawing at me with an insuppressible stubbornness: thoughts of Mother and Father and Ruth working in a restaurant—the wretchedness they had gone through, to which I had undoubtedly added during those months of silence and apparent indifference; thoughts of the future, fearfully wondering if they would have to go on doing such work for the rest of their lives . . . if I would ever be able to play baseball again . . . how I could possibly endure to be cooped up for two weeks in this tiresomely white room, . . . and the bitter helplessness of my position.

And then above the comparative stillness of the hospital, the occasional faint rattle of dishes, a closing of a door, the subdued voices along the corridors, there came the sound of a violin, playing a soft lament which seemed to completely express the mood I was in. A sense of ease slowly, imperceptibly, stole over my whole being. It was as though some one else had penetrated into the depths of my misery, as though some one had experienced and grown sad from suffering like my own, and had then emerged to express it in music. Neither knowing, nor caring, why I should suddenly feel transported from unrest to contentment, I gave up my senses to the enchantment of the moment. Some one had known! Some one had

felt! And sensing that, made life at once seem less bitter and cruel. The awareness visited me without permission or explanation; and like all art which exercises its magic over us it soothed and invigorated without asking to be analyzed.

The daughter of Doctor Low, in whose private hospital I was staying, had never studied psychology, but she liked to play on the violin. She had never had pointed out to her in any academic way the effects which various kinds of music have upon especial moods. But with the instinct of an artist she responded to her environment. The voice of her violin began by expressing the pervading spirit of the hospital, then slowly and gently it modulated into a major harmony, while the chords of its piano accompaniment gradually vibrated with suggestions of calm courage. The mood of the hospital changed, rising from self-pity and despair to acceptance and serenity.

The doctor's daughter was slowly dying from multiple sclerosis; the doctor himself suffered from asthma. I thought it strange then that doctors, who know so much about the mysteries of life, could still fall victims to any of its diseases.

I went to sleep and dreamed—dreamed of being pursued by a whole army of Marine sergeants, who were laughing at me cruelly while they brandished their fixed bayonets. Limping along desperately I finally fell exhausted, bumping my knees against a jagged rock. God! how they hurt! I couldn't get up! The sergeants were upon me, running their bayonets through my knees and kicking me in the shoulder! I screamed and shouted in horror! And suddenly I awakened. A nurse was shaking my shoulder and telling me that she had come to prepare me for my operation.

My mouth and throat were parched. My brain was burning. My legs seemed to be enveloped with fiery hot lead —and a sickening pain gnawed at my secret flesh. Jesus! Jesus! What are they doing? Killing me by inches? . . . burning me up? I opened my eyes. The nurse was rubbing my forehead with alcohol. "A drink, please," I murmured. But she shook her head. "Not just yet, sonny, but here's some cracked ice." I held the ice in my mouth and my head began to clear. But the burning in my knees seemed to grow worse as my senses slowly awakened. It was as though gas-jets had been lighted under them and were now being turned on full force. "I can't stand it!" I moaned, rolling my head from side to side.

The nurse stopped soothing my forehead and began to rub alcohol on my arm. "Oh, you'll be all right," she said softly. "Just try to keep quiet for a little while." She left the bed for a moment and came back with a needle. "Hold still for a moment, please. . . ." And she jabbed the needle into my arm. I kept on munching cracked ice and presently felt better.

After a while the nurse went to the door and Father, Mathew and Johnny came into the room, with boxes of flowers which Mother and Ruth had sent. Mathew had some cigars for me . . . "when you feel better and are able to smoke them," he explained. Johnny looked at me timidly, curiously, and asked how I felt.

"Like hell!" I exclaimed, and Father glanced disapprovingly.

"Did they cut you very much?" said Johnny as he stared at the mountainous contraption which surrounded my knees. "Jesus," I said, looking at Father defiantly, "it feels as though they made hamburger of my legs and then lighted a fire under them."

The doctor came in and smiled ingratiatingly at my callers, felt of my pulse and examined the temperature chart which the nurse handed him. Presently every one left the room except the nurse, who gave me another hypodermic and held one of Mother's roses up close to my nose so I could smell it. "Give the flowers to some one else," I sighed; "they remind me of my wife's funeral." Unaware that I had been married, she considered my remark a very poorly attempted joke. "Honestly," I assured her, "I can't stand cut flowers."

She looked very displeased. "All right," she said patiently, "but don't try to kid me that you've ever been married."

I insisted that I had, and began to pour out to her all of the sadness of my feelings about René. She listened sympathetically and finally leaned over and brushed my cheek faintly and hurriedly with her lips. Then she left the room, taking the flowers with her.

Ten weeks later, on my nineteenth birthday, I left the hospital, walking with the aid of crutches, my knees being quite inflexible. Towards the end of that first wonderful week of freedom Johnny took me to a baseball game which his high school was playing on the university campus. It was early June and the sun shone with a caressing warmth. The weather-beaten seats of the old wood stands seemed like old friends, comforting and welcoming—exuding mellow traditions of historic games and sentient years of happy scholastic rivalry. That day they were alive once more with the gay shouts of schoolboys. The atmosphere of the scene cast a spell of reminiscence over me—the crack of the bats, the smell of the warm earth, the movements of the players and the exhilaration of the game suffused me again with a bitter-sweet bliss. When, if ever, would I be playing base-

ball again? And if it were never, what use was there to living? Except to help Father and Mother get out of that damned restaurant. Thank God, I thought, I was through with hospitals; in a few weeks more I would be able to go to work.

I sat in the front of the restaurant behind an untidy counter, cluttered with boxes of nickel cigars and a dilapidated cash register, taking in quarters for the meals which Mother and Ruth served, smoking cigarettes and wondering if my knees were ever going to loosen up and if those occasional twinges of pain which I felt in my shoulders were due entirely to the strain of using crutches.

Mathew had brought over some textbooks on bookkeeping, which I opened at first with hopeful curiosity—and then closed discouragedly after my first bewildered attempt at study. I had never learned to study, was incapable of intellectual application. Such things, alas, were for smart people like Mathew, a graduate of Normal School who even maintained that he got pleasure out of reading long and serious books.

Still, Johnny of late had seemed to enjoy reading; not only reading, but even studying Latin; and not only studying, but even practicing on his 'cello. It was a strange thing, I thought, that a boy of fourteen should be interested in such things and yet like to play baseball. On his way to and from his 'cello lessons he would stop in occasionally, proudly slip the instrument out of the case and play some new étude he had just learned. "How do you like this?" he would ask enthusiastically, and his fingers would run over the strings as though they were dancing with delight. His eyes sparkled with a gleam I could not understand. He would add: "I'm studying the thumb position now and

playing in the high school orchestra!" What strange things, I thought, to become excited about! Sometimes he carried along with him a book which he was in the midst of reading—"The Deerslayer" or "Cousin Bette," "Oliver Twist" or "Tom Jones." Discussing them eagerly he would tell me I ought to read them. "Now that you can't move around very much," he would say, "I should think you would like to read."

I felt that under the circumstances perhaps I might like to read; although ever since I had left school I had never been able to see any attractiveness in reading, as long as I was still able to move around and enjoy other things. Reading was for old people and scholars and—now since it had been called to my attention—perhaps invalids. I tried to get interested, but I had to give it up. The books that Johnny left me were much too serious and difficult to follow. I turned to adventure and sensational magazines; they at least were things I could understand and enjoy.

But in the hours at night and in the many hours sitting there by the front window of the restaurant there was nothing that could prevent my mind from teeming, struggling in a smoky haze of unrest and inactivity, turning over and over in its feeble, inchoate way the unwieldy problems which life had thrust upon me.

I was lost!

And conditions grew worse. A young farmer from Norfolk—a small paper-mill town not far from Potsdam—had been corresponding with Ruth, and now he came to Rochester for a visit and stayed for two weeks. Before he returned there was a wedding ceremony, hastily celebrated in the little rooms above the restaurant. A girl from Ruth's Sunday School class played the nuptial march on the battered piano—that poor old piano once so new when it

entered our house so proudly on one of those glorious Christmas Eves in Potsdam, which had followed the family in its many movings and now at last was very sadly out of tune. The minister of the church was there with his sanctimonious smile and read the service with a funereal voice. There were sandwiches and coffee from the restaurant, and a brave fruit salad—trying to look festive in the midst of irremedial gloom. Mother "bore up" cheerfully until the very end, but when her tears finally came they revealed all her woe, the dreary bitterness of losing "another one of her children."

School was out and Johnny came over to help in the restaurant, washed the dishes and waited on table, mopped the floors and tried to find time to practice on his 'cello. But as the summer wore on business fell off, bills accumulated and disaster threatened. It became more and more difficult to walk with crutches and the faint twinges in my shoulders had developed into a persistent pain. The whole world seemed to be pressing down upon me in a determined effort to keep me from moving. And without physical movement I was sure I would grow mad, since for me there was no other form of activity. Meanwhile out at the baseball park the Hustlers were winning another pennant, but I didn't have the heart to ask Father for money to go and see them play. Restiveness and discontent, anxiety and dejection! My God!—I wondered—when is this going to end!

Into the midst of despair there came a little excitement, which helped us all to forget for a moment the trials of our own lives. Bold headlines in the newspapers announced that Germany had declared war. For weeks the sheer incredibility of it fascinated me to the exclusion of everything

else. While people all around deplored such a cataclysm I secretly hoped that the excitement would continue, for with innocent brutality I felt very grateful for anything at all that could take my mind away from myself. Indeed, deep within me an acute wish was born, too impossible, it seemed, ever to be realized, but tremendously enticing. If only our country could get into it! How much more thrilling it would be! Forced to the sidelines in my own little game of life, I craved, just so much more intensely, to witness a tumultuous show. But by the time school opened in the fall and Johnny went back to learn in his Cæsar class that: *Omni populi Belgæ fortissimi sunt,* I was feeling that my own battles in life were not so gigantic, after all, and that by reading of other people's courage my own had been immeasurably strengthened.

Late that fall a letter from Ruth told Father of rumors of many new buildings to be erected in Norfolk, and added that though he had lost all of his money and was no longer able "to do contracting" he might "just possibly" get a job on one of them as a superintendent of construction.

Years before, Father had done work in Norfolk, where he was well known. So he wrote to some of the "parties" whom he knew, inquiring about the rumors, and after a few weeks of negotiations he had elicited the promise of a job. Once more the smile of triumph beamed upon Father's face. And the undying optimism, which through the years of poverty and hardship in Rochester had merely been slumbering, awakened once more with its original freshness and practically the same innocence. Off with the apron and on with the best suit, while he strutted proudly in front of the restaurant owner and told him that he would have to leave. "Yes, you understand, I just took this tem-

porarily. I'm a building contractor and I've got to get back to my work. There's a big contract in the northern part of the State, on which they're holding off work until I can get there. Yes, I've built a good many buildings in my life, I can tell you . . . big ones too . . . and now that I'm fifty years old I'm not done yet either . . . I expect to build a good many more. I could never git started in Rochester because here everything is politics. And that's one thing I won't get mixed up in if I never get a job."

So the furniture was packed in the truck and we said farewell to Rochester. Johnny would remain at Mathew's until he finished high school. But as for myself, I was a dependent, crippled with rheumatism, who must needs follow Father, back to the neighborhood in which I had spent my early youth, and from which only a few years before I had struck out so vaingloriously.

CHAPTER XX

The brick house into which we moved in Norfolk sat up on a high ridge overlooking the Racquette River. Situated on the outskirts of the village it commanded a view of the surrounding country and looked down in a detached sort of way across the river toward the rest of the town. It was large and spacious, with a porch clear across the front, from which in the morning one could see the sun rise over the hills across the valley. From the rear of the main part, like the tail of a letter T, extended a small brick gable elongated by a capacious woodshed and summer kitchen at whose extreme end, of course, there was the customary outhouse. Along the north of the brick gable there was another porch, from which on summer evenings one could see the setting sun. Upon these porches, when the weather was pleasant, I began the day and ended it, greeting the sun in the morning shortly after it had climbed the eastern hills, and saying farewell to it in the evening as it sank its russet glow into the distant waters of the St. Lawrence.

In that house I descended into the deepest depths of Hell, and within those same brick walls I somehow managed to emerge again.

That year I was confined at last to the wheelchair and bed. My physical environment was limited to the world of the living-room—where Mother had placed my cot so that I might have the company of the people and activities of downstairs—and the two porches. If I traveled outside of those worlds the journeys had to be made in my imagination. From my wheelchair on the front porch I could hear the sound of the hammers as they drove nail after nail

into the new "block" which Father was building down on the Main Street, and when Father would come up to the house for dinner and supper he would tell me of the progress which the work was making. The frame was up . . . the roof was on . . . the floors were being laid . . . the trim was being put on and the doors were being hung. Through it all I led the life of a vicarious builder. "Gee, Dad," I would say, "I only wish I was up on my feet, so I could be down there helping you."

Never before had physical activity seemed so attractive to me. It had always been attractive—indeed, I had enjoyed doing things with my muscles to the exclusion of almost everything else, I could do things with my hands which other people found awkward or impossible, my coordination was excellent; but never had activity seemed so necessary, so consciously alluring, so maddeningly irresistible as it did now that it was denied me. The hope that I would soon be on my feet loaned encouragement for a while in the gloom of my confinement, but after months had dragged by with not a glimmer of improvement, that same hope had to borrow from other emotions in order to keep itself alive. It could no longer lend. The excitements of war, moving, Father's new job, new friends, vague prospects, had all at length to grow stale and wearisome. The dry fever of unrest was gnawing at my vitals. I must get interested in something! I must *do* something! But there was nothing I could do—nothing that could hold my interest save the yearning (which became a mania) to get better and to get out of bed.

At Easter vacation Johnny came up from Rochester for a visit. A great deal of his time he spent by the side of my bed or wheelchair. During another large part of it he practiced his 'cello close by, calling my attention to the "nice little phrases" and playing them over and over again—

because they always sounded so grand. Talking incessantly about the things he was studying, the things he was learning, his startling discoveries in the world of knowledge, he radiated an atmosphere of enthusiasm and eagerness which was both contagious and exhilarating. He would insist that he was going to teach me German—though he had studied it for scarcely a year himself. He would intersperse his conversation with the language in order that I might learn as much as possible before he had to leave. In the evening, when the family was all gathered in the living-room, and Father would begin to make inquiries—which he supposed were very subtle—about the progress of Johnny's spiritual and moral welfare in his new home with the atheistic Mathew, Johnny would answer him with upsetting questions about the Bible in relation to history or certain dark and disgraceful episodes in the records of the Christian religion. The array of his knowledge filled me with wonder and I listened to him with pride and amazement. It would be great, I thought, to possess knowledge like that, to know things about history—and to be able to read German. Hell! Why couldn't *I* know things as he did? That certainly ought to be interesting! But there was no one to teach me. How could I learn anything without a teacher?

After Johnny had left, the house seemed desolate. He had brought such a spirit of gayety and excitement into it, talking enthusiastically about so many things; always bubbling over with energy and interest, he had surrounded our lives with an atmosphere of youth and expectancy. Now that he was gone Mother would talk about his "brightness," how quickly he had learned things, and how "smart" he had become. "The only thing is," she would say, "I think it's a turrible thing that he's drifting away from the Church, and Mathew encouraging him with all his

heathen ideas." She would sigh very sadly and then go on: "I don't know why it is that all my children don't seem to care about religion. Why, if people outside hear them talk and don't know any better, they'd take their parents for regular infidels. Yes, they would!"

"It's all right," Father would add, "for children to be smart, but when they get to the point where they think they know more than their father and mother, then I think their education is a pretty sorry business. Pretty soon then they'll be believing that they know pretty near as much as God. And if they go much further they begin to say there ain't any God. Then if they get that far there's no help for them! They're lost! Educated fools—that's all they are!"

But as for me, Johnny had put a spark in my mind which kept on smoldering after he left. He had seemed to get so much excitement and fun out of just reading, and thinking about ideas, that I began to suspect that such things might even interest me. He had kept encouraging me to try to read some books and promised to send some in which I might be interested. Perhaps I might learn something if I had to stay in bed much longer. Johnny had mentioned so many events of history which had sounded very interesting. I could read history! Why not? I had liked it quite well when I was in school. Then, when he came up to see me again, I could talk with him about such things!

He sent me some books and urged me to start at once to read them: a Life of John Fiske, of whom I had never before heard; "Talks to Teachers on Psychology," and "Talks to Students on Life's Ideals," by William James; "Be Good To Yourself," by Orison Swett Marden; and an "Outline of Ancient History," by Webster. Included

with these were several copies of the *American Magazine* and *Current Opinion*. I looked at them with a new curiosity, not expecting that they would furnish me with enjoyment, but hoping that by studying them hard enough I could gain some of the knowledge which Johnny possessed and seemed to make so exciting.

The magazines were all right, with their stories of success and heroic struggles against handicaps. I could have gone on reading them. They were interesting and inspiring; but the information which they gave me amounted to almost nothing. Once cast aside they were soon forgotten. Anodynes for the moment, they left me in the same state of ignorance with which I came to them. Still, they did this much: they showed me that it was possible to enjoy reading—at least some things.

With the books there were complications; it was almost impossible to get interested in them. Going from one to the other before any of them was very well started—a fickleness of attention, caused by the vain hope that the "next one" would be more interesting—they all became confusion and an arduous task to continue. To make matters worse, my shoulders—irritated, I supposed, by the strain of holding the book in front of me as I lay in bed—began to pain again, and thus enforce me into further idleness.

Moreover, when I stopped reading the pain did not cease, but grew in intensity and spread to my elbows. Finally one day Father brought a doctor from Ogdensburg to see me, a famous surgeon who was universally worshiped in the community and considered a veritable miracle man. He talked with me for a while, asking questions about my past life: "When did you feel the first pain in your knees? Did you ever see Christy Mathewson pitch? What do you

think about the war? Did you run around with the girls very much? Ever had gonorrhea? How are your teeth? Ever had trouble with your tonsils?" And examining me carefully he asked about the operation on my knees. "Who did that butchery? Ye gods, what a job! Did he tell you what he did it for? Heavens! what could he have been thinking about? Absolutely unnecessary! Did you a great deal of harm and couldn't possibly have done you any good." He straightened up from the bed and looked at me with a sad sort of seriousness. "Well, son," he said, "I could tell you some bad news. Can you take it all right and not let it bother you? I think you can or I wouldn't have even mentioned it to you."

My heart beat more rapidly, but not from disquietude. Bad news was usually exciting, and for the moment I anticipated the excitement with pleasure. "Shoot," I said. "I guess I can stand anything you can tell me."

"Well, my boy, you have what we doctors have long considered a practically incurable disease called arthritis. Now, don't misunderstand me—it's not always incurable. You may be one of the lucky ones to get rid of it; but your chances are very small. This ankylosis which has taken place in your knees is now beginning in your shoulders, and from there it may go—and it often does—to every joint in your body, making them fibrous—freezing them so you can't move." The doctor continued: "I'm telling you this now, so you can prepare for what is before you. Now, don't give up hope, because medical science doesn't know everything yet, by a long way. Next month, next week, even tomorrow, some one might discover a means of curing you completely. Always think of that. But meanwhile it's wise to prepare yourself for the worst. If you know the worst that can likely happen you can sometimes

make ready to get the best of it. In your case, for instance,"—the doctor smiled encouragingly—"if you can't use your body any more you can concentrate on your mind. And I wouldn't be surprised if you had a pretty fine organ there to work with." He gazed at the books on the chair beside the bed. "Fine books you're reading," he commented; "they'll help you develop your mind. Hm! William James! Now there's as good a book as you'll ever find. I get down his Psychology every year and read the chapter on Habit. So you're reading that, eh? Well, then, I'm not going to worry a bit about you. You'll get along. I'll make a bet on that."

The doctor remembered his more customary professional routine and drew out his fountain-pen. "Now," he went on, "I'm going to prescribe a little morphine for you when the pain gets too annoying. You may not have much pain. In that case you won't have to bother about it. But if you do, this will fix you up while it lasts. I'll explain to your mother about using the hypodermic needle and she can give you half a grain at night during the periods that you have your pains. They won't last very long—and they may not come at all. Why, next summer who knows but what you may be up playing baseball! Keep a stiff upper lip, and I'll be back to see you before long."

It took me a long time to realize fully the import of what the doctor had told me. His words, his manner, his magnetic and invigorating personality, had so hypnotized me that for a long time after he had gone I felt tremendously stimulated rather than depressed. He had almost made me believe that I was about to undertake an heroic career.

But pain visited me again and like an obliterating curtain shut out the past with its hopes and resolutions, its

brave point of view and confident plans, binding me to the moment, the all-absorbing moment of physical sensibility. And once more I realized how effectively the stress of the struggle can kill the desire to become a hero. Courage is one thing when considered sentimentally, but something else when some practical occasion calls for the exercise of it.

After the first use of the hypodermic needle I became very willing to resort to it again; at first only when the pain was severe, and then gradually when I felt the least uncomfortable. During the day I tried again reading books, but it went very slowly and seemed to grow less and less worth while. Finally I gave them up entirely and depended for my reading upon the ephemeral anodynes of the magazines. Morphine and magazines became the drugs of my forgetfulness: indulgences which were in the beginning accompanied by acute pangs of conscience, chosen as they were despite an inner warning, and in lieu of sufficient courage to accept a little suffering and to triumph over it.

Most people, as did I, look upon pain as something to be avoided at all costs, a condition wholly evil and willingly accepted only by masochists; not realizing that it is the safeguard of both our spiritual and our physical life, the impetus of most of our progress, as the ability to feel it is a good gage of our degree of civilization. Pain refines our senses and prepares them for ecstasy; it warns us of dross in both our body and our spirit. It challenges our mind, giving it the choice of subtilization or oblivion. But, like pleasure, it need be neither sought after nor indiscriminately accepted. It is not a panacea for salvation, but a warning that we must save ourselves. It cannot lead us into a ready-made Heaven, but it can—though it may not—endow us with a sense of tragedy. Its warnings will never bring us peace, but they may help us to discover beauty.

CHAPTER XXI

In the middle hours of the night, when every one else was asleep, I would lie awake with every nerve of my body taut for action—tightened for an activity I could never engage in.

Have you ever felt like smashing something . . . crashing a window or knocking over a skyscraper, for no other reason than that you simply must do it? Have your nerves ever been possessed with the mad desire to destroy everything, to jump with wild abandon and wave your arms fiercely in the harmless and impalpable air? Have you ever imagined how you would feel to itch all over and yet be unable to move to alleviate the torture? If you have, you know a slight intimation of the madness I felt. But I could not even give vent to the annihilating impulse of pounding the side of the bed. I could not move! I could only lie there waiting in suspense for my body to explode and tear itself to pieces in madness.

The torture could be tranquillized by morphine—and it must be tranquillized. The only alternative was utter insanity. So—at first desperately and reluctantly, though finally with no compunction—I would call to Mother and she would give me a hypodermic. First a quarter-grain . . . then a half . . . and a whole! Until at length I was taking five or six grains a day. It ceased being a lure; it became an inexorable compulsion—an addiction no longer involving choice or reason—a necessity for which I would

unhesitatingly have murdered, or as unhesitatingly sacrificed my otherwise wretched life.

Under Mother's ministration that needle of mercy poured heavenly release into the tortured nerves of my body. To that sensation there is nothing comparable in man's normal life. It was like anguish raised to the *n*th degree and then suddenly reduced to the infinity of nothing. It was like unendurable continency ending in divine consummation.

And what a consummation! The tenuous insouciance of morphine! Losing one's body and becoming an exalted and superior intellect! Elevated to divinity and a cloudless serenity upon which no trouble of the world can possibly impinge. In this state of euphoria all problems of this world and the next are solved with instant despatch. There is no agony, no dread; just a paradise of elation, a superhuman activity of the mind, overruling all other feelings with a sense of superiority. And then there is sleep.

In the first hour of awakening I felt the torpor of indifference, an invulnerable lassitude. Then slowly, gradually, my nerves would awaken and within the fevered fibers of my muscles the desire to move again was born. It would mount to a passion: a passion which could never be fulfilled and which carried ever in its wake the acute sense of frustration. Still I vowed that I would never again ask for "the needle"; not because of the bliss which it brought me—indeed not—but because that bliss made the rest of life seem so unbearably hideous. I vowed—but before the all-conquering morphine no man-made vow can exist for more than a few hours. In the daytime I was crushed by the burden of idleness; at night the burden was the same, but it must be carried through the darkness. Slowly, relentlessly, the irritation would travel until at last my mind would succumb to the inevitable temptation.

"Mother! Mother!" I would call. "Will you please step here a minute?"

Mother would come and look at me sadly, her face gloomy with discouragement and pity.

"I have a terrible pain. Will you give me some morphine, please?"

"But, Peter," she would plead, "it's hardly four hours since you had the last. And the doctor, you know,—well, you remember what he said."

"Please! Please!" I would cry impatiently. "It's terrible! I can't stand it! Give it to me now! The pain is terrible!"

"All right." Her voice was muffled with discouragement, and she would leave forlornly to go into the kitchen. A couple of minutes would drag by like as many hours.

"Jesus Christ! Mother! What are you doing! Hurry, for God's sake! I can't stand this pain!"

But there was no pain—save the agony of desire. No pain, that is, except the tension of my nerves, which must find release or suddenly shatter themselves, and the trembling of my stomach, which fluttered like a leaf.

Yet man has an instinct for self-preservation. When all else fails that instinct works alone, bare handed. *Am I going to let myself die in the bliss of drugs?* There had been —there still were—many occasions when I would have welcomed death; but, like all other desires, even the yearning for death passes with the hours. If you try suicide at this moment and peradventure it fails, tomorrow or next week you may be searching for the secret of longevity. There are few things in heaven and earth more mutable than the desire for self-effacement.

The great physician from Ogdensburg said: "If you give up morphine it will kill you!"

The modest country doctor who called on me each week

assured me that if I didn't give up morphine I would be as good as dead within a year.

A dilemma with two horns—both apparently fatal.

Am I going to let myself die in the bliss of drugs? What better death.

"Could man be drunk forever
With liquor, love, or fights."

Why *not* live in Paradise unto death; in that glorious chancery of dreams? Why not be intoxicated with morphine forever, and live in that ethereal domain "beyond life"?

"But men at whiles are sober
And think by fits and starts."

And when I thought (I do not know where those thoughts came from, unless they were distilled by that instinct of self-preservation; a perverse instinct, indeed, to sweep me back into a life of pain and agony in preference to a Paradise of bliss followed by an easy death) I thought solemnly and decided that I would face the torture of denial.

A curious thing, man, who works and struggles for Utopias and Paradise, which if realized would bore him to extinction; who strives and slaves for charm and ease—and when they are achieved restlessly yearns for the primordial and savage; who in the midst of peace would be irked by the lack of intensity and danger; who thinks he wants reforms whereas his actual delight is in the struggle he makes toward effecting them.

Away with artificial dreams and drunkenness; the good of all artificial schemes fades and pales! I'll give up mor-

phine! I'll intoxicate myself with Pain! Such was my lawless fancy.

But the all-conquering morphine made ludicrous my resolve. While it suffused my veins I was the Zeno of Stoics; but when its magic deserted me I became the most craven of mendicants.

Yet I had sworn in the presence of Mother, in one of those moments of morphinous fortitude, that I would take no more of the drug. I had commanded her not to give it to me. Thus the burden which I could not carry came to rest wholly upon her shoulders. She listened to my complaints, my threats, my abuse, my curses; and at length from sheer pity would give me infrequent hypodermics.

The months dragged on, bringing with them the faint suspicion of a curious change in my condition. The hope was even born that I might snatch victory from the very jaws of death.

Then, one day in the agony of unrest as I was begging shamelessly for the assuaging balm, Mother came to the side of my cot and gazed down at me with a curiously calm smile. Yet her calmness could not quite conceal a certain triumph and eagerness in her manner as though she had been keeping a secret for a long time, and now wanted to tell me.

"Peter," she said with a sigh of relief, "I'm not going to give you another drop of morphine. You don't need it, and you've got along without it for three whole months."

Got along without it for three months? My God! what was she talking about! "What do you mean?" I snarled.

"Just what I said," she replied with the suggestion of amusement in her voice. "You may not believe it, but

it's the truth: unbeknown to you I have been substituting warm milk for morphine in all the injections I have been giving you for the last three months, and you've been just as well satisfied as though it had been morphine."

At first I couldn't believe it; yet I knew that my mother would not deliberately lie to me. Then the thought that it might be true made me tremble with anger. In the mood I was in I was blind to the benefits I had derived from the subterfuge; I was sure of one thing: that I had been the victim of a cruel joke.

"I don't believe it!" I cried. "You can't fool me! Give me another injection, for Christ's sake!"

Mother remained immovable, and answered my abuse with gentle persuasion. "It's true, Peter," she said, "and you've never known the difference. Time after time you've said what a relief it was, when all I used was milk. So it can't be you need it. Now you just try for a little while and see if you can't get along without even the milk. Probably your greatest trouble now is your imagination."

CHAPTER XXII

MOTHER was the heroine. She cured me of the morphine habit!

Belatedly I, too, felt a certain sense of triumph. And because of that sense I became vastly invigorated, even getting up enough courage to make another attempt at reading.

When a man cannot possibly occupy himself in any other capacity he is sometimes driven to contemplation. He may even be swept into the unnatural activity of thinking—that is to say, he may become guilty of that rare crime against Nature upon which the whole march of evolution depends. I was so moved—purely by that process of Nature which had reduced all other activities to an impossibility. This does not say much for the widespread potentialities of mental awakening. Indeed, it implies that the growth of the mind, the acquisition of wisdom, depend largely upon the experience of adversity. Let it be so! Adversity *is* the essential catalytic for mental ferment—though no insurance of it. For the hypersensitive organism the necessary degree of adversity is naturally less, for it requires less. Such an organism *feels* more. A true genius sees the world at a different angle from that of his fellows. That is his adversity—a tragedy which drives him to suicide or immortal expression.

For a whole year and a half I had not heard from Johnny, and I supposed that when he learned about my taking morphine he had lost all hope for me. But now that I had emerged from the addiction with the determination to seek respite in the acquisition of knowledge, my

mind inevitably returned to thoughts of him who had first attempted to arouse my interest in "learning." I wanted to write Johnny a letter, but a certain vain pride made me decide to wait—wait until I had made some progress with my fresh resolution.

Thus I began again—this time with a novel of Balzac's which turned out to be surprisingly interesting. Indeed, by the time I had finished the two novels which Johnny had left me I had become fascinated, feeling that I had become acquainted with a "new" people and a "new" country. Paris now seemed to exist familiarly and wonderfully in my imagination, and the life of Parisians rich, free, and exciting beyond anything that could exist in tiresome America. I was drawn to the glamour of life as Balzac described it, though I had, of course, not the slightest glimmer of the art which gave that life meaning and beauty. But there did begin to dawn upon me the faint suspicion of why other people enjoyed reading.

Then one day the village doctor, proud and pleased at my triumph over morphine, sent me a copy of De Quincey's "Confessions of an Opium Eater." With a very natural curiosity I opened it and began to read. That a book could be so interesting I had never even dreamed! Yet my interest in the story did not seem nearly so novel and strange to me as the circumstance of my conscious concern and delight with the manner in which it was told. Never before had I been aware of such a thing as style, not to mention such a curious association as that of scholarship and enjoyment. In De Quincey I felt the first dim glow of pleasure in sheer writing—though of course I did not understand quite how the essay charmed me. I only knew that I felt it and had not the wit to ask why. With all of the unusual elements of the mere story I was personally and

physically familiar. But they alone could not lay claim to my captivation. But extraordinary as my feeling of appreciation was, it was just a faint spark—in comparison with the conflagration to follow.

I picked up William James' "Talks to Teachers on Psychology" and turned to the chapter on the laws of habit:

> "The great thing in all education is to make our nervous system our ally instead of our enemy."

How peculiarly sentient I was to that idea after what I had gone through! The simplicity and sheer wisdom of it nearly lifted me from my cot in one grand ascent of exultation. But that was not all; one tremendous idea after another came flashing up to me from the pages of the essay. I came to the quotation from Darwin:

"If I had to live my life again, I would have made a rule to read some poetry and listen to some music at least once every week, for perhaps the loss of these tastes is the loss of happiness, and may possibly be injurious to the intellect, and more probably to the moral character, by enfeebling the emotional part of our nature."

I immediately resolved that the very next day I would begin to cultivate an enjoyment of poetry and music.

I was learning! I was learning! Now, past twenty, I had at last discovered what it meant to have an enthusiasm for knowledge. Naively, credulously, I had begun to burn with a studious zeal.

And how fiercely I burned when I looked into the essay "On a Certain Blindness in Human Beings"!

> "Our judgments concerning the worth of things, big or little, depend on the feelings the things arouse in us."

God! How true that was! How many times had I felt inchoately the same thing, without being able to express it!

Many years have passed since I first read that sentence of William James'; but the magic still is in it—even as the magic is still in the sound of his name: a name that will ever be associated in my mind with my birth into a new life.

Fascinated, I read further! But the sensations of those moments are incommunicable. I would stop for a moment intoxicated by the magic of some idea, tasting it, savoring it, drinking in the fluid joy of conscious enlightenment. Reading such things as I had never before dreamed, I wanted to shout to the whole world the discoveries I was making. I would call Mother from the kitchen and insist that she listen while I read to her one choice paragraph after another. I tried to tell her of the great things that I felt. "Ten times more wonderful than playing baseball!" I would exclaim. "And what is more, the pleasure lasts! It accumulates, promising infinite and infinitely greater felicity!"

Mother would smile, but not without appreciation. "My goodness, that's a pretty tall order," she would observe, and she would look at me with a faint expression of wonderment.

It was an Epoch in my life. A "Higher Vision" had been granted to me!

After William James, I had to write Johnny a letter! I simply couldn't wait until his next visit to apprise him of the strange and magnificent things that were happening to me. I wrote to him in the rhapsody of elation which filled me, with all the biggest and superlative and flowery words at my command. And thus began a correspondence which acquainted me with new and wonderful delights.

CHAPTER XXIII

JOHNNY had fallen under the spell of a Unitarian minister, a graduate of Harvard and a fearless scholar. Now, in his last year of high school, he had won honors in scholarship and distinguished himself as a 'cellist—all this in addition to earning a large part of his expenses by playing professionally for weddings, banquets and occasional dances. I was proud of his achievements, but I wondered, a little apprehensively, if with these main preoccupations he might not have forgotten me—or at least have no time to answer my letter. But my apprehensions were groundless. A few days after I had written him I received an answer. And such an answer! Page after page of enthusiasm and encouragement, words of advice and paragraphs of inspiration.

Occasionally in the midst of our greatest happiness we are on the verge of tears—tears of joy. Such an occasion had visited me. There was something in Johnny's letter, something not revealed in the words or the sentences, which yet communicated that joy to me. Perhaps it was that we had been drawn together in a common interest: the pursuit of knowledge. Perhaps, sharing with him the glorious zeal for learning, I felt for the first time an association which was unutterably wonderful.

Johnny sent me a set of the Harvard Classics. When the books arrived it was like a great day of celebration. Mother opened the box and Jenny carefully unpacked them, reading the title of each volume as she withdrew it from the

case. I could not eat, so absorbed was I in that promised land of red and gold. Suddenly I wanted passionately to become a "cultivated man."

Previously, whenever I read a thing that I did not understand I willingly passed it by without pausing to discover its meaning. But now there had come over me the desire to understand everything I read; to be an assiduous student; to have no loose threads dangling, incomplete, from any subject once covered.

If there was the slightest doubt about a word, I looked it up, went into its etymology as far as the dictionary would carry me, in an endeavor to unearth its exact meaning. It was a long time before I came to distinguish between knowledge and understanding. But finally one day the distinction dawned upon me, while reading a paragraph in Gibbon's "Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire." I suddenly realized that beneath all the words, the facts, the opinions, which were coming up from that printed page, through that incredibly wonderful mechanism of the optic nerves, into my cerebrum, and, there encountering infinite patterns and associations, were being finally and almost instantly transmuted into ideas. The ideas were being enriched and elaborated by comparison with other ideas already there; beneath all that surface process of consciousness there was still an inner something: a subtle, intangible understanding which Gibbon possessed, but yet could not put into words. There was a meaning between the lines which, if it were to be grasped at all, must be evolved by the reader from the impalpable substance before him—an understanding without which the highest element of anything written, painted, sculptured, built or sung, is lost: a tenuous attribute beneath the visible patina of any creation. It was impossible to understand anything by just look-

ing at it! The spectator's judgment was sure to miss the root of the matter and to possess little truth.

"It is a wonderful achievement," I said to myself, ". . . to be able to distinguish between knowledge and understanding."

CHAPTER XXIV

Thus my adventure proceeded—an adventure, thrilling, glorious, unutterably wonderful. For months I read eight hours a day: the Harvard Classics, Gibbon, Voltaire, Nietzsche, H. G. Wells, Shaw, Galsworthy, Royce and a host of other Olympians. *I Promessi Sposi,* of which I had expected so much, I could not read—nor the *Divina Comedia,* try as I would with a constrained sense of duty and fairness. The Koran disappointed me. But upon re-reading the Bible, especially the Psalms and Ecclesiastes, I discovered a wholly unexpected charm and beauty. Milton's prose I liked, but his poetry put me to sleep. And after Nietzsche it was almost impossible to read any other philosopher except Voltaire. As for Hazlitt and Huxley, I swallowed them voraciously, eternally hungering for knowledge and more knowledge—consumed with desire for that last Truth which would set me free.

Early in my days—and nights—with the Harvard Classics I had read the "Autobiography of John Stuart Mill"—read it and succumbed! Mill became my hero and prophet, a prophet toward whom my allegiance could not for a long time be shaken, despite my naïve fondness for undigested "Nietzsche." Mill's essay "On Liberty" had been a major event in my life. And a few years later when specious arguments in favor of the Eighteenth Amendment were sweeping over this "free" country like a tidal wave of distortion I took particular delight in epitomizing my opposition to them with those magnificent lines: ". . . The sole end for which mankind are warranted, individually or collectively,

in interfering with the liberty of action of any of their number, is self-protection . . . the only purpose for which power can be rightfully exercised over any member of a civilized community, against his will, is to prevent harm to others. His own good, either physical or moral, is not a sufficient warrant." I was very proud of that borrowed wisdom—that is, until I later became imbued with Socialism.

Those glorious days! In the midst of the war boom, which gave color to a household that had so long been concerned with the drab struggle for a living, a building contract in Potsdam fell into Father's hands and the family moved back to the beloved town of my childhood. Johnny had at length joined the army and been made a lieutenant, but his new activities did not prevent him from writing me long letters from training camps, describing the strange new life of a soldier—and of how in the Camp Library at Fort Sill he had unearthed—of all things—copies of Nietzsche, Treitzsche, and even Bernhardi . . . and of how, in an army camp, he had personally discovered the poet of poets: Percy Bysshe Shelley.

Mathew was in France leading an army band, discovering the virtues of Cognac, and developing a great appreciation for the French people and their habits. His character seemed to have changed curiously, to have developed an inspiring freshness, to have grown more human. He wrote letters to me which did not even mention Success or Economic Independence, but which were full of gaiety and adventure, hinting even at times of a timid, fledgling, tentative respect for poetry and romance. "These people," he wrote of the French, "have something that we don't possess—and it is wonderful!"

To all of us, indeed, the war seemed to bring a prodigious

invigoration. The atmosphere at home was imbued with fresh energy and excitement. Letters from France and far-off Oklahoma created an interest in worlds outside of our own—an interest which, once begun, carried us farther and farther toward new and larger horizons. The patterns of our lives became more complex, rich, and inclusive.

That summer I lay on my cot on the porch of the house at Potsdam, breathing in the aroma of honeysuckle and listening to the cries of the youths as they played their games of baseball on that same field where years before I had felt the thrill of victory. I lay there, reading, reading, with a continual glow of enthusiasm and happiness—an enthusiasm which would carry itself way into the night, as I re-made the world, its morals, its religion, its education, its philosophy.

For I had become a philosopher—so I thought—and Johnny now headed my letters with "Dear Zarathustra."

Those years unfolded themselves happily, serenely. The war ended and I became twenty-six. Again, in search of a job, Father had moved the family—this time to Watertown, New York. Johnny had married and was living in Rochester. Mathew had returned from Europe to the staid, prudent routine of his professional career. President Wilson had come back, defeated yet unresigned, from the "Versailles Conference of Spoils." The Utopia of World Peace and Understanding, toward which I had looked forward as the great justification and outcome of the war, appeared more and more fantastic—a cruel delusion that had visited a dreamer immersed in the optimism of H. G. Wells. The world was in confusion and would not listen to reason nor be guided by intelligence. Watertown itself seemed a conglomeration of war millionaires, parvenus, upstarts, greedy dentists and papermill owners of incredible vul-

garity, gossipy wives, girls whose minds were the quintessence of vacuity, boys who for the lack of knowledge as to how to amuse themselves inevitably turned to viciousness and sadism. No one read in Watertown. They bought automobiles and boats, built bizarre houses and filled them with gaudy furniture. If they had time from their restless search for pleasure they would pick up the newspaper and run over the comic strips and society news and then hastily drop the sheet for fear their minds would begin to smoke. Indeed, it seemed that if one removed jealousy and greed from the list of Watertown's ruling passions there would be nothing left.

Bitterly I tried to dismiss them with what I considered a superior Nietzschean gesture; pronouncing mankind a vast herd rushing stupidly to destruction. The country was in the throes of another economic depression. It would ever be concerned almost wholly with food and sex. When surfeited with both it turned to material aggrandizement, and often sheer greed. All right! . . . Let it go!!

Thus I tried to cast aside humanity's difficulties. Confident of my own sagacity, certain that a world made up of intelligent individuals sharing my wise point of view would automatically be a pleasant and peaceful Utopia, I endeavored to live in dignified and superior isolation. There in my room full of books in Watertown I sought to view the world in a disinterested way.

But I couldn't! The blood of the Evangelists was upon me. The world had to be saved! And its salvation—I concluded—could be accomplished only by Education. I was especially susceptible to the promise of Education because I had dated my true birth into this world with the discovery of its virtues. I had been redeemed by the process of study.

So, to do my share of bringing knowledge to the ignorant, I appointed myself the "Apostle of Enlightenment." Sadly enough my mission was not auspiciously successful at home. Both Mother and Father had finally to be despaired of. They simply would not see the Light. Despite all my preaching and exhortation they resolutely clung to Methodism, Capitalism and the Republican Party.

Not only did they not see the light, but Father retaliated by bringing the Methodist minister to call on me; thereby establishing a precedent which soon developed into a weekly visit and prayer by my bedside. It went on, strangely enough, to a friendly and interesting companionship.

The minister was a curious anomaly for Methodism—a witty and eloquent Irishman by the name of Shannon. For many weeks Dr. Shannon's visits were marked by my cordial antagonism—an antagonism aroused by what I considered a presumptuous, stupid, condescending exercise of his pastoral duties. I wanted always to tell him that I had neither need nor respect for his prayers or solicitations, that I considered him worse off than I was, immersed as he was in stupidity and hypocrisy. Indeed, when he was out of my presence I pronounced him a damned fool, and cursed my cowardice for failing to tell him so to his face.

But when he had come the next week to greet me with his warm, ingratiating smile, I could not bring myself to believe that he was insincere, or his interest merely professional. For he would talk to me for a few moments in the vernacular of good-fellowship, with a good-humored friendliness that weakened my skepticism. He would fill my pipe and light it for me, though I knew that he was supposed to be opposed to the use of tobacco and alcohol in all of its forms. He would chat with me about baseball

and the progress of my Major League favorites, inquiring about my reading, and ask, more or less facetiously, what new arguments I had discovered against God and the Bible.

Small wonder, then, that in the face of such apparent reasonableness, I began gradually to doubt my superiority, and to look upon Dr. Shannon less as an adversary and more as a friend. He ceased to pray by my bedside, and I could not help feeling a little proud and triumphant. I loaned him copies of "The Soul of a Bishop," and Upton Sinclair's "The Profits of Religion" to read. When he returned the books to me he spoke generously and favorably of both of them—but still insisted that the greater part of humanity needed true religion and derived some benefit from it, even the church. And he considered that his greatest usefulness to the world resided in his remaining a minister.

At such moments a dim suspicion of our different temperaments assailed me. He *felt* something in religion. I did not. He felt that primordial instinct of humanity which, in this life of three parts sorrow, one part joy, hungers for respite—some promise of their unfound happiness—some escape from the hard realities of the world! I saw religion with the eyes of an embittered critic, one who had had what went under the name of religion forced down his throat since infancy, and whose interest in it now was historical, utilitarian and analytical.

Diametrically opposed to religion was science. The battle between them was as natural as it was inevitable. Having left one side of the struggle it was very natural for me to join the other. Thus I had fallen out of the arms of religion into a faith in knowledge, had become imbued with the Socratic belief in the explicability of nature, and a trust in intelligence as a panacea. I boldly traded any illusion what-

ever for disillusion. I shunned defiantly myth and enchantment; and though I had at one time resolved to cultivate an increasing enjoyment of poetry, I now placed it in the category of naive and youthful interests. Where was the logic of poetry? Where the exact knowledge which would embrace the world of phenomena? Though I listened to music with increasing fascination I was inclined to regard it as merely a pleasant pastime. Intoxicated with the notion that the secret of existence could be expressed in a syllogism, I explained great music as being the purely sensual creation of super-intelligence. And whenever music became so great, so world-embracing that it disturbed my confidence in the possibility of ever expressing its meaning in cold, rational words, I decided that it was because I had not yet reached that high plane of intelligence which would enable me to do so. In brief, I had become a Platonist.

And alas! I fear—vainly proud of my knowledge.

With Dr. Shannon religion was an instinct. He had the common touch that could not be denied. "Have your logic!" it seemed to say. "Humanity possesses something before and after logic, something that the lyric poets of the Bible came nearest to expressing . . . but dialecticians!! Never! . . . 'Dost the hawk fly by wisdom?' " he would say.

So I did not win a convert to agnosticism in Dr. Shannon, but I gained a friend—a friend who called me Job and had staunch faith that I would repent . . . and that the latter part of my life "would be blessed by the Lord more than the beginning."

It was comfortable at last to think of him as a friend rather than a victim or a possible convert, and I began to flatter myself upon my liberal-mindedness. Here I, a militant agnostic was a close friend of the Methodist minister! That's real liberalism for you! But wasn't he also a liberal?

He no longer came to see me from any sense of duty. I was sure of that. Nor did he offer prayers for my salvation. The only religion we now discussed was that of human brotherhood—and that, at my instigation. What drew us together? . . . We were both interested in saving humanity.

But more important than all this—we listened to music! To him Bach and Haydn were the Gods of Music; and their music, like the Psalms, expressed the universal religion. A strange mixture was Dr. Shannon—very strange. Born in Catholicism and brought up in a Catholic orphanage, he had run away as a youth and had been given refuge in the home of a physician, a man who was a bachelor and a Methodist. That physician must have been a most extraordinary Methodist, for he adopted the youth and brought him up without even attempting to proselyte or coerce him into the Protestant fold.

Dr. Shannon worshipped his benefactor as a hero. Years later, after I had delved into the psychologies of Freud and Watson, I thought I understood why Dr. Shannon had gone into the Methodist ministry. And when upon the death of his benefactor he left the church, went to New York and in a few years became an internationally known journalist, I was sure of it. When he had—inevitably—come to the extreme points of the limited world of religion he still remained loyal to the man who had befriended him. Staring into the unfathomable universe from the secure and simple ground of religion's promises he, a noble and gifted man, had been eager to break away from the romance of Gods and Heavens and win for himself a new refuge, but he had seen the necessity which most of mankind has for simple illusions.

Valete, Michael Shannon, ac plaudite.

CHAPTER XXV

THE pains of arthritis were over. They had left me physically helpless though content. But the strain of so much reading began to take its toll upon my eyes. (At least we all thought it was the strain of too much reading that affected my vision; none of us had then heard of such things as arthritic cataracts.) For a while rest seemed to help them, but at length, and despite long periods of rest, they gradually and obviously grew worse.

Suddenly a threat of blindness loomed upon the horizon, and slowly, gradually, began to uproot my contented habits and shake my happiness. When I could not read or talk to visitors a restiveness would attack and rob me of the serenity that I had struggled so hard to achieve. Then a dim suspicion came over me to the effect that perhaps I had been living, after all, in a world of books instead of that of reality—a very pleasant world indeed so long as one could remain in it. But now I was threatened with exile; for my existence in that world had depended upon my sense of sight.

At night when the sun would fade there was a sense of completeness momentarily come over the world—an interlude of meditation, a respite from doing and making, acting and acquiring, when one was satisfied to close one's eyes and view the world through the mists of memory and imagination. One was content. Let the world of sight and activity pass by! After supper when the lamps were

lighted I would enter into the world of my books. I had seen enough of the real world for today.

But I could no longer feel that way. No matter how wonderful twilight was I could not stand it perpetually. I was avid to do and to see. Man needs new experiences, new sensations, new struggles to bring him to rest and contentment. I hungered to see, to feel, to exercise fully all of my senses. And now that one was being taken away from me it seemed as though one of death's lieutenants had come to rob me of part of my life.

I could not believe that such a thing could happen to me. Since I had been confined to bed I had discovered my new world, experienced some of my greatest joys. The joy which I had felt in the process—a process generally spoken of as my regeneration, and considered to have been an astounding transition from physical to mental activity—gave birth to the notion that I had perhaps discovered the secret of the universe, solved the riddle of the Sphinx. But that world had been revealed to me through the instruments of *other people's ideas*. Whenever discouraged I had opened a book and thereby entered into that little private universe. And there I had lived and acted in the lofty atmosphere of Emerson's Essays, Whitman's "Leaves of Grass," William James' "Pragmatism" or Bellamy's "Looking Backward."

Mother had looked upon my reading as a pleasant diversion, a nice activity, beginning and ending in itself, for occupying my mind during hours, months and years of immobility. It was "something to do" like playing checkers or amusing oneself at the piano. Much as I had tried to impress upon her that I was gaining knowledge, that reading was merely a means toward that glorious end, her attitude toward my "convenient form of amusement" re-

mained unchanged. In her own life knowledge had been gained by experience . . . precious little did one get out of books.

And I would often wonder if she were not clearly right.

For now in the increasing darkness I was driven, resistingly though inevitably, back into the labyrinths of discouragement and bitterness. There seemed to be truly nothing left in life.

For a few minutes after her school was out Jenny would come to my room and read to me from my favorite philosopher, Nietzsche. ". . . To an intrinsically sound nature, illness may even act as a powerful stimulus to life, to an abundance of life . . . Whatever does not kill an excellent man makes him stronger." While she read those lines I felt courage rising within me like a flood. I was defiant and happy. But not long after Jenny had left the room a smothering silence and blackness would again settle down upon me. In vain would I try to recapture the magic of: *"Je fait cultiver mon jardin"*—a sentence which, ever since reading "Candide," had been a miraculous talisman of inspiration and encouragement even in the lowest moments. It had lost its charm. How could I cultivate my garden now? How could I go on defying adversity—chained to a bed, and blind!

2

In the midst of the gathering darkness came the news that Johnny had moved to New York to take a position in one of the large theater orchestras. He wrote me encouraging letters—letters which echoed the struggle of his own academic idealism against the encroaching materialism of the hard, vulgar occupation of professional music.

An artist at heart, the responsibilities of marriage, the pressure of earning a living by routine performance on his 'cello, made him just so much more defiant of the so-called "practical world."

Also, in the turmoil of New York, Johnny found time to think of me in other connections. He sent me books and consulted medical specialists who were supposed to be interested in arthritis. And finally, while I had about reached the depths of melancholy, he sent word that he had made arrangements to bring me to New York, where I could receive the treatment of the great Doctor Luxow of Vienna, the distinguished scientist who had isolated, and discovered a serum for, the arthritic microbe.

Once more into my world of apparently irremediable gloom and immobility there came a ray of hope. Congenitally an enthusiast I rode to New York on the wings of sanguine expectation. Mother would have reminded me that I was a very heavy and awkward piece of baggage, for she accompanied and took care of me in the very mundane drawing-room of a Pullman. Nevertheless my "spirit" soared toward liberation and light. Eight years of incarceration in a bed had not enchained it. The idea that there was hope, no matter how illogical and unsupported by evidence it was, had my heart in favor of it.

Once I had thought that I wanted to commit suicide (a phenomenon which is always a product of reason and never of feeling), but my "heart" had been against that. Later, when I had discovered a new life for myself in the adventure of learning, I looked back upon the thought of self-destruction as stupid and puerile, espousing the cause against youth and uncultivated instincts. But that same adventure of learning, which in the beginning had promised me Truth and Freedom, had led me in a cynical circle

back to the same life-destroying thought. This time that thought was cruelly supported by the knowledge I had gained, the disillusionment I had experienced.

Indeed, I had discovered knowledge to be an extremely seductive and dangerous mistress, luring me on with the promise that nature could be explained, enticing me with the suggestion that in it alone resided the power of a universal panacea, leading me continually to new enigmas, profounder mysteries, and at length bringing me to the extreme points of its periphery from which I must stare, disillusioned and disenchanted, into the unfathomable.

At those points knowledge coldly forsook me, leaving my hitherto despised instincts and emotions to battle with life's greatest enemy, the sense of futility. My instrument of intellection counseled: "Everything is futile! Destruction, neglect, oblivion awaits you and all your efforts! Death is a relief which your base instincts and crude emotions alone keep you from embracing!" But again, I say, my "heart" was against it, defying reason in the spirit of revenge, and clinging to romance. I arrived in New York tenaciously hopeful . . . lyrically indifferent to the discouragements of logical evidence.

Long, long before my journey to New York I had become aware—crushingly, unalleviably so—that I was now not only the black sheep of the family but also the white elephant. Inert, blind, unable to help myself in any physical way, my body weighed upon this world a useless, hopeless burden—and an especially heavy burden upon the struggling backs of my mother and father, who had earned so much and won so little respite in their battle for existence. By no rational process with which I was familiar could I discover for myself any *raison d'être*. Shameful, bitter, I had denounced my very impulse to live. "Let the day

perish wherein I was born! . . . Why died I not from the womb? . . . Wherefore is light given to him that is in misery? . . ."

Yet to New York I went, hopeful that I would see and move again!

CHAPTER XXVI

JOHNNY met Mother and me at the Grand Central Station with an ambulance. We all rode in it to his apartment, where I was to stay for a week before going to the Central Hospital to be examined and treated by Doctor Luxow. Feeling Johnny's presence again did something to me. He had always given me the consoling awareness that my infirmities were unimportant, that they could be forgotten in his company, that all that mattered to him was my mind and spirit. He even conveyed the impression that I was a person of some importance. And now most of his "time-off" from the theater and rehearsals he spent reading and talking to me. The strange noises of the city, the "elevateds," the taxis, the continual din of traffic, the suggestions of commerce, and all the material affairs of the world—all were shut out from our presence as he would sit there in the tiny room of the apartment reading to me from Havelock Ellis' "Dance of Life."

Late into the night after he had returned from the theater he would put a soft needle on the Orthophonic Victrola and play records (which, with books, were his only extravagances) for my delectation. Over and over I listened to the Brahms First Symphony and was thereby transported into Paradise. Brahms and Bach and Havelock Ellis! How he loved them! Often as he was reading from Ellis or listening to a Bach choral or prelude, tears would come into his eyes. I could not see them, but I knew they were there. "My God! Peter," he would exclaim, "if any-

body can be in the presence of such beauty and not tremble violently from the sheer joy, the tremendous triumph of it! . . . why, people must be crazy! . . . they must be vegetables! . . . they're not alive! Why, that stuff conquers the universe! It conquers death! They talk about gods! Why, Jesus Christ! Brahms was a god if there ever was one! And so is Havelock Ellis! They make the world seem small in comparison, just as the world makes the rest of mankind appear insignificant!"

Johnny, too, was a rhapsodist. Perhaps we were both hereditarily disposed toward enthusiasm. I know I felt then pretty much as he did—let me listen to the Beethoven "Fifth" and I'd go through the tortures of hell and come out with a chuckle—and if I could have written it I too would have defied all the fates and thumbed my nose at eternity.

Such was the company that I should always be in—the joyful, life-furthering, exuberant company of the true gods of this earth. They were not intellectual, nor Ivory Tower philosophers; but vital, Promethean, fecund, glorious!

But in our journeys through those Elysian fields we were occasionally interrupted by the mundane complaints of Johnny's wife. A pretty girl, about four years younger than Johnny, blonde, attractive—and conscious of her dazzling attractiveness, which in her vanity she misconceived as beauty—she had eagerly sought to go on the stage shortly after Johnny had moved to New York. Her attempts had met with an early success and when I arrived she was proudly gracing the chorus of a revue on Broadway. Justly, perhaps, she resented my presence in New York, especially my presence in her own home. Moreover, her affection for her husband amounting to a very jealous and possessive infatuation, she was not particularly able

to bear his extended and nightly sessions with me imperturbably. She even despised books and hated to see a new one come into the apartment, because—she explained—Johnny was forever sticking his nose in them and never paying attention to her. "My Lord," she would grumble, "about the only time you ever realize that I'm alive is when you're in bed with me and I'm trying to get to sleep!"

Thus were the communions of amateur philosophers interrupted—interrupted by a wife who craved her husband's attentiveness . . . a glittering, avaricious girl whose interests and ambitions seemed to be as far removed from Johnny's as those of a banker from those of a scientist; whose ideals were as disparate, indeed, as those of a chorus girl and an artist. She disturbed our halcyon solitude and reminded me unpleasantly that this world had other aspects besides those which Johnny and I contemplated so loftily. She emanated the atmosphere of physical pleasures, the delight in doing things: dancing, traveling about the colorful city, playing baseball, walking in the Park, buying pretty clothes, making love, listening to praise and flattery, making money, showing-off, eagerly waiting and expecting people to tell you that you are beautiful—or that you are a wonderful baseball pitcher.

I had first seen Johnny's wife, Sally, when she was sixteen, radiantly pretty, golden-haired, well-formed, alluring, with a voice that was, even then, rich and seductive. I still held that picture of her, somewhat enhanced by the enrichments of a fuller blossoming. Thus, when Johnny would finally leave my room to go to bed, my mind, having beguiled itself so happily for a few hours in the lofty reaches of philosophy and art, would ineluctably descend to the contemplation of the nocturnal joys and pleasures of Johnny's married life.

Alas! before and after philosophy men ate and men made love! Life was so biological! So preponderantly a matter of emotions and appetites! Why should I live with so much of life denied me? How was it possible to go on? In vain would I try to think of some paragraph from Ellis or Bertrand Russell, which would serve as a touchstone of contentment until I could get to sleep. But pictures of baseball fields and heroic contests kept floating before my eyes—and visions of golden-haired, lithesome girls. Then in desperation I would call to Johnny. And when he at length came to my room I would ask him to play once more the second movement of the Brahms Second Symphony. He understood: placing the record on the Victrola, he would leave the room. Before the music had come to an end I had again been transported to another world, and it would not be long before I would calmly glide into sleep.

CHAPTER XXVII

But those wonderful hours with Johnny soon came to an end—all too soon. I went to Central Hospital and was placed on exhibition before a noted doctor and sundry other specialists. After so long an absence from hospitals I was again "taken in" by its hocus-pocus of mystery, miracles and hope. Beneath all my acquired skepticism there still lingered in me a sanguine faith in the magic of medicine. Perhaps the great specialists were scientifically-minded after all. And though the ordinary practicing physician might be three parts charlatan to one part scientist, the great physician was probably another Pasteur whose predominating purpose was the advancement of knowledge.

What a disappointment! The upshot of my conferences and consultations with not only the Viennese specialist, but many other famous physicians as well, was the dangling and sadistic assurance that something might be done for me if I only had enough money to pay for expensive treatment and equally expensive care. The chance that I might benefit from any of the régimes which they had conjured up was not promising enough to warrant their putting me through them without a better prospect of financial reward than I could give them. So the "specialists" began to avoid me and at length the hospital authorities sent me to Bellevue.

At Bellevue I became Exhibit Number Forty-five-thousand-nine-hundred-and-something for the enlightenment of multitudinous internes and sundry visiting physi-

cians. Lecturers would expound the history and peculiarities of my case to bored and mildly curious disciples of Æsculapius. But if they ever tried any remedies upon me they were either so subtle that they escaped my attention completely, or so abstract that they would have required a Christian Scientist to appreciate them. As a matter of fact, the dark problems of my pathological condition remained as actually impenetrable to them as they were glibly solvable by their theories. The optical surgeons, intrigued by the opportunities for experiment which my arthritic cataracts offered, decided to try an operation. The result was that hemorrhages formed in my eyes and thus made the shadows before them more deeply opaque.

At length, after my allotted six months had elapsed at Bellevue, I was discharged as an incurable and shipped as a matter of routine to City Hospital, on Welfare Island.

Thus my hopeful journey to New York had ended in a charity hospital.

That surely meant neglect and oblivion. There was no appeal from it. In this country of feverish activity and fierce competition wherein even a physically capable being often finds it difficult to maintain an existence and to overcome despair, what chance had I, utterly helpless, totally blind! Johnny had done a great deal for me; but even he, after learning the verdict of the doctors, had seemed to wilt with discouragement. But not for long.

"Pete," he had said on that first day of my transfer to City Hospital, "I can't help you financially any more just now. All that I have done has been done purely because I wanted to do it, without any sense of sacrifice or duty. You know I don't believe in altruism. Everything that every one does is primarily selfish. I helped you because I got a tremendous pleasure out of it. And right now my

most enlightened self-interest convinces me that the best thing to do is to save enough money to get you out of this hospital and keep you out. That'll take quite a while. If I took you to live with me now, Sally would leave me and very likely get a divorce. That would be foolish . . . a sentimental sacrifice . . . because it wouldn't be long before you'd have to come back to this place, anyway. I admire you not because you're my brother, but because you've got a lot of courage and a very good mind . . . and because of the intellectual and artistic excursions we have shared together, and the encouragement your struggle has given me. I can't insult your courage and intelligence by making any such gesture as having you come to live with me now despite the consequences. . . ."

Johnny was curious, and kind, and wise. There was a gentleness in his skepticism which seemed to respect the very things which he repudiated. He was never overconfident in his conclusions. His ear despised "jazz" so thoroughly that he would either suffer nauseatingly or go to sleep whenever he had to listen to it; yet he was forever defending it as the expression of the modern spirit in music. "Great musicians and great men," he would say, "have almost invariably been denounced by their contemporaries. I want to be tolerant at least."

Of course such words were the very sustenance of life for me, because in them there was the implication that at least one person in this world not only refused to consider me a burden, but even held me a kindred and invigorating spirit. That gave my life the justification which it so sorely needed during those first weeks at City Hospital. I had come into an existence so totally devoid of illumination that the handicaps of my previous plights seemed Utopian by comparison. And just as we never at any given

time appreciate our well-being and causes for joy until our circumstances have been reduced to conditions much worse, so I had not fully been aware of the happiness which still remained for me in the shelter of Mother's care despite my blindness and immobility. In youth we yearn for maturity, power, responsibility and fame. We know that we can never be contented without them. In maturity we sigh for peace and comfort and affection, a philosophy that will give us serenity. First I wanted to be the greatest baseball pitcher in the country. Not long after I would have been satisfied with much less fame and a little more assurance of physical comfort. Still later I asked merely to be able to move—without prowess, skill or strength. And then there had followed a period during which I would have begged and even prayed for the faculty of sight and the ability to hold a book, and counted myself the happiest man in the world had they been granted to me. At last I had come to the point of asking only one thing of life—an escape from City Hospital.

Man is a fascinating animal. No matter what the condition in which he lives he will always have Utopias dangling in front of him. The story of Adam and Eve is, after all, a story of one of mankind's greatest urges, poetically conceived and sung. Even in Paradise an excellent man yearns for that struggle which will bring him the sense of triumph! He is greedy for novelty in the midst of peace, and has a gusto for living in the midst of his wretchedness. For him there is no perfection—but nothing so imperfect that it cannot be borne.

CHAPTER XXVIII

Though City Hospital has its occasional comic relief, it is for the most part a sordid institution with only now and then a sparkle of contrasting illumination to light its gloomy corridors and amuse its patients. An excrementitious organ of the monstrous urban growth of New York, it is very naturally an important one. Its patients in general are made up of the derelicts of humanity which the city has so ruthlessly used and then cast aside. From the point of view of the young interne it is a handy place in which to wear off the awkward newness of his instruments and his degree; for the patients are neither hypochondriacs nor are they hypercritical. Through the eyes of the social worker the institution is a spectacle against which she must harden her heart or become the victim of a continual nightmare. To the patients the hospital often becomes a habit, like the practice of law, the profession of pedagogy, the art of saving souls—or even like life itself.

I arrived at City Hospital replete with knowledge gained from books, and possessed, beneath a temporary feeling of discouragement, of a philosophy: a half-baked, half-digested philosophy of nicely arranged premises and conclusions—that is to say, a dialectic delight of words and ideas, a book-bound classification of the forces and purposes of the universe, together with a handy theory for turning the world into a Utopia. Having cast out God and castigated capitalists and kings, I held myself to be a free soul in the midst of physical imprisonment. Atheistic after Voltaire, self-reliant

after Emerson, passive and tender after the Beatitudes and Buddha, socialistic after Upton Sinclair, yet defiant and truculent after a misunderstood Nietzsche, I was very conscious of the appalling extent of my knowledge, still confident of the superiority of the mind over the body; yet hoping passionately nevertheless that something might happen to release me, and place me in an environment of scholars and philosophers. The desire to be appreciated still burned fiercely within me.

It was not long after my arrival at City Hospital before the anomalous nature of my case received a certain amount of curious attention. I was visited by the superintendent, various doctors, several nurses and numerous internes. I could scarcely have received more attention had I just been elected to high political office. They approached me with that "here-is-a-poor-fellow-who-has-suffered-incredibly-and-is-still-optimistic" look; so I responded to their inquiries with appropriate morsels of the dear-sweet philosophy of the late Doctor Crane. Of course it met with considerable success. I was praised most effusively for my fortitude. It is true that no fortitude whatsoever was involved in my arrival at the hospital. Rather, it was a plain case of the inevitable. But because I smiled according to the prescribed and much advertised formula—and perhaps because I was neither illiterate nor alcoholic—I was accepted as one of those brave smile-when-everything-goes-wrong sorts of persons, who happened to have a tongue in his head.

But man does not live by encomiums alone. In fact, there are certain hungers and several humors that reduce the importance of eulogies to a value somewhat less than nothing. And it was into one of those evil states I sank when the evening meal was announced by a strong stench from the ward serving-room. It needed more than a manu-

factured smile to face that meal with equanimity. A strong stomach would have been far more practical. There was liquid that was alleged to be vegetable soup—ugh!—stuff which the orderly who fed me called bread, three prunes that were just recognizable, and a mug of tea. After it was over I yearned to assuage what remained of my appetite with a few long draws on my pipe. But smoking was prohibited. Thus, in desperation, I turned to engage my neighbor in conversation.

Though of course I could not see him, my neighbor's voice indicated that he was old, Irish, and good-natured. He began to tell me his troubles. Addicted to alcohol, he had acquired an alcoholic ulcer on one of his legs. His kidneys and liver were defective. His abdomen and legs were swollen. He was friendless, up against it, and out of touch with his only relative. But all these troubles were as nothing to him compared to the fear he felt over the possibility of being sent to the City Home. "If I only could kape from goin' to that place!" he would wail.

Now, the City Home was a comfortable institution for the care of the old and indigent, in many respects more desirable and commodious as a place in which to live than City Hospital. So I was at a loss to understand this great woe over the thoughts of being sent there. But my solicitude gave way to amusement when I discovered that pride was at the bottom of it all—that the specter of becoming an out-and-out pauper was more dreaded than the shadow of death. This fear, I later learned, was general among the patients. So long as they were in the infirmary there was some excuse—at least they made the subtle distinction—for their accepting the charity of the city. That they might not be subjects for medical treatment, or that City Home was a much more comfortable place in which to live, or that

senility was as good an excuse for accepting charity at the Home as it was at the Hospital—all these arguments had no effect upon that curious feeling, that dread fear that they have of being forced to go there. My neighbor, in common with most of the patients, was as incorrigibly proud as he was incurably hopeful. Thus I soon gave over my efforts to lay his most terrifying ghost, and settled back to ponder my new environment.

A conversation interrupted my thoughts. Some very feeble old man had asked the nurse to perform a service for him. She was replying to him, coldly, mercilessly. "How old are you?" she rapped out.

"Seventy-eight," he replied.

"Well, you're too old to be around here taking up room. You ought to be in the City Home."

Another old man, who had been a longshoreman for forty years, working harder in a physical way than a hundred ordinary people, and invalided to the hospital from muscular paralysis, asked the nurse to get him another cup of tea.

"My God," she rapped out again in her most exasperated tone, "what's the matter with you? Why don't you get it yourself—you can't expect a nurse to *wait* on you!"

I was experienced somewhat in physical pain, but I soon discovered that I knew almost nothing of mental cruelty. I had not dreamed that there were so many people in this world who could be so deliberately brutal to sad, broken derelicts who couldn't fight back.

So this was a sample of the new world in which I was going to have my being—a world in which I would probably spend a long, long time; perhaps even the rest of my life. Certainly I could never go back to live with Mother and Father. They were getting old and I had already been

a tremendous burden to their lives. As for Mathew, I had not heard from him for years. And Mark had now taken on the burden of supporting his wife's parents. Indeed, the economic world had yielded—and was still yielding—little more than a living to any member of the Holland family. The burden of my existence placed upon any one of them would have meant extreme sacrifice and at length, no doubt, a condition of insolvency.

But whether one's back is against the wall or against a cot in a charity hospital, if neglect and extinction stare him in the face, he has little inclination to occupy himself with the fruits of reason, namely: ethics, morals, or a contemplation of economic and social amenities. In the midst of adversity man does not retire to an Ivory Tower to meditate upon his uselessness to the world or the economic burden which his presence places upon it. He fights! He tugs and struggles! He has no time for precious inquiries into the vexed question of how and why or whether the game is worth the candle. He will put off those inquiries until the first taste of victory.

The instinct to fight in man preceded by a long, long time his capacity to rationalize that instinct. Indeed, even more primordial than that may be, as Nietzche has declared, the Will to Power—the will to triumph over death itself. Man may curse his fate and the injustices of life. Push him far enough however and such superficial—such mental—stuff as most criticisms are made of is straightway thrown overboard, and he becomes overwhelmingly conscious of the impulse to live—to fight against the forces that seek to annihilate him. I said "overwhelmingly conscious"; it is far more accurate to say that the consciousness is overwhelmed with the impulse to live.

Indeed, the period that I went through was not notably

a conscious state. I fought more or less unconsciously. And now I describe the experience retrospectively as a natural phenomenon of biology; an inchoate emotional struggle, rather than an intellectual one.

Soon after I had resigned myself to immobility and blindness a centripetal force began to modulate my habits; with the result that other elements of my strength became indefinitely increased.

I had come to City Hospital where life was so precarious that one made jokes about the dead and the moribund—where sympathy and warmth and cheer were supplanted by contemptuous (paid for) administrations; where the walls were gray, and the stinks violent, and where the only laughter was that of the cynic. But what must the import of that world be upon one's soul? Must it desolate one of all beauty and visions of felicity? Must it leave one, as Christian justice once left the forlorn bodies of its offenders, hanging on the gibbet—dead but not yet buried? I decided not.

Having resigned myself to the irremediable handicaps of my being, I discovered that I had the strength to cherish a little romanticism—even, indeed, to give birth to a sense of humor.

One evening a young Italian who had been brought into the hospital several days before with a serious liver condition, reached the stage of insupportable melancholy. Taking a safety razor from his bedside table, he walked quietly into the bathroom, sat down on the stool beside the tub and calmly cut his throat. He was discovered leaning over the bathtub with blood gushing from the wound. The doctors rushed him into the operating room and patched him up as well as was possible, but he died the following morning. At noon the orderly came around the ward demanding

"All safety razors, blades, scissors, and any sharp instruments." They were confiscated by order of the authorities. That night when every one else was quiet an Irishman sang out across the ward in a rich brogue: "Well, byes, I heard that some porr fellow jumped off the Quanesboro bridge this afternoon . . . and now the authorities are goin' to tear the bridge down."

I discovered that I was able to laugh. Moreover the impact of that Irishman's wit did something to me—did something very powerfully! At first, though I had laughed—rather grimly—at his joke, I resented the levity of his attitude toward a poor fellow's suicide. But then the real "heart" of his remark began to dawn upon me. It wasn't that he had considered the death of the Italian particularly funny, but rather because he had been amused that the authorities should be so misguided as to presume that he or his companions would even think of committing suicide. "My God! What a joke!" his voice seemed to say. "They must be crazy if they think we'd knock ourselves off! Why, Holy Mary! I've been through enough already to make a dozen doctors pass out, but I'm still kickin' and grinnin' no matter what happens!"

2

Naturally death was very common at City Hospital. The rattle of the metal cot, mounted on wheels, which was used to carry the deceased to the morgue, was a familiar sound which called for various comments. As it went clattering down the corridors or across the pavement some one would casually remark: "There goes another stiff," or "There goes another one out," or if the victim had been known to cause considerable trouble and been generally disagreeable, the

commentators would sigh: "There goes another nuisance."

The occasion of the final journey of one moribund was an opportunity for the amusement of two habitual gamblers. "Two-bits he lives 'till morning!" said one. "Two-bits he doesn't!" the other responded. And the bet was on. When the inevitable iron ambulance came rolling into the ward in the early hours of that morning, one fellow at least had something to be delighted about. He had won two-bits.

But the *danse macabre* would often give way to a different rhythm, furnished by the G. U. ladies. One evening these nymphomaniac creatures were invited to listen to a piano recital given by Ernest Schelling. Toward the end of the program that very estimable pianist conceded to the request of a large part of his audience and played a modern jazz composition. The lure of the primitive rhythm was too much for one dusky lady from Harlem to resist. Out into the aisle she danced and with hips which she managed like a spaniel shaking off water, she began to do the "black bottom."

Besides these rhythms of death and life which throbbed almost continually in the grim world of the hospital, there was another dance, sacred and profane—but, most of all, amusing—the dance of the sorcerers! the solemn capers of the inevitable soul-savers.

Soon after I became a patient in City Hospital I learned that though the care and treatment which I received at the hands of the medical staff might cause my pathological difficulties to flourish rather than languish, there would never be any reasons for apprehension concerning my spiritual welfare so long as I remained in the institution. Indeed, from the moment of my arrival in the reception-room, it seemed that the principal curiosities itching the minds of

the clerks who gathered about my stretcher were not so much of a physiological as of a theological nature.

"Are you a Catholic?" one of them asked, as she bent over my litter.

"No," I replied.

"A Protestant, then, of course?"

"No."

I became aware that the inquisitive lady was scrutinizing my face very carefully. The tap of her pen indicated that she was just a bit nervous and impatient.

"Well," she said, finally, "you're not a Jew. What *is* your religion?"

"I don't happen to have any," I had to admit.

"You must be *something*," she insisted. "I'll put you down as a Protestant."

Thus my soul was classified before my body was examined.

A red card had been placed in a conspicuous spot at the foot of my bed, indicating that I was a Protestant. The color, I suppose, signified that I had, at some time or another, been cleansed by the Blood of the Lamb.

The beds of my Catholic neighbors were adorned with white cards, while those of my Jewish friends were decorated with tags of blue. The purpose and convenience of these colors became obvious in due time. By means of them the chaplains, Jewish, Catholic and Protestant, are able to tell at a glance as they enter the ward just where the harvest lies and how the spoils are to be divided. They save the poor pastors the embarrassment of finding themselves innocently engaged in lavishing their sorceries upon some dogged disciple of a hostile creed.

The morning after my arrival a low, necromantic voice

boomed at the side of my bed. "Good-morning," it said. "I am the Protestant chaplain. Is there anything I can do for you?" I wanted very much to acquaint a friend of mine in the city of my sudden change of address, so I suggested that the chaplain might telephone him. "Well," he replied with his death-like voice, "I'm afraid I can't do that. You see, that's the function of the Social Service." Then, with some embarrassment, he announced that there were meetings in the chapel every Wednesday night in addition to the regular Sunday services. With a "hope I'll see you there" he went on to the next red card.

But it was easy to understand, after I had been in the hospital a little longer, the chaplain's reluctance to devote himself unstintingly to the service of the patients, for I learned that his life was a hard one. He could take up no collections at his meetings, and his salary was pathetically small. There were never any marriage fees to help him line his pockets. And whenever he escorted the soul of a moribund patient over the threshold to Paradise his remuneration for the job was paid only in the currency of the spiritual realm. While his classmates in the divinity school provided themselves with the fat of the land, he was engaged in hauling bankrupt prisoners in the State's calaboose back to the path of salvation, or teaching feeble-minded children the secrets of the Holy Trinity. In brief, he missed most of the rewards which in this modern day usually fall to his sacred office.

But what the chaplain thus lacked in business opportunities his amicable assistant made up for. A man of immense proportions and a heavy voice, he dominated the Amen corner at the chapel services, functioned as the sexton, and held down a job as librarian of the Protestant collection of dusty books and time-seasoned magazines. His versatility

did not end there, however. He was also the hospital's newsboy and did a good business, managing to get a penny more for his papers—with an additional nickel on Sunday—than the regular street-merchants, who are prohibited from coming on the Island. He was a great handshaker among the patients and a jolly fellow with the nurses. But if in his service for the Lord his actions sometimes took on a worldly aspect, he made up for it by his zeal in ringing the bell for the chapel services, for in the performance of that pious office he never failed to convince every one within earshot of the infirmary that a fire had broken out. Thus, following his chief, he helped to spread the True Faith.

An odor of sanctity hung heavy about the whole hospital, and the business of saving and preserving souls was carried on in a very efficient manner. One large room was dedicated to it exclusively. It had all the appurtenances of a *bona fide* chapel. At one end there was a Catholic altar; at the other a Protestant chancel. Separate doorways aided in keeping the illusion of exclusiveness. The benches were reversible after the manner of streetcar seats. Whether or not God turned about politely to accommodate the diverse beliefs of the chapel's communicants, I was never able to learn, but I was told that the resident priest and minister did a pretty good business.

"Now, don't you go spitting around the Protestant doorway," said the priest one morning during Mass. "If you do they'll be callin' you dirty Irish."

Religion of a somewhat substantial quality visited the hospital every Tuesday afternoon, for on that day several ladies from the Bible and Fruit Mission came around the wards to distribute oranges and buns. Fluttering here and there among the beds which displayed red tags they inquired: "Which will you have, an orange or a bun?" Upon

one occasion an old fellow, provoked either by greed or a humor to embarrass, answered, "Both." "Can't give you both," the angel of charity snapped very curtly. "Then I'll take a bun," the old fellow decided. "It sounds better."

Lest the beneficiaries forget the ways of salvation in an orgy of indulgence the society had provided reminders. With each orange or bun the missionaries handed out a tract which told how a soul was saved or a miracle performed. Being members of a Protestant society, they were strictly requested by the resident priest not to give any of their gifts to the Catholics. But in the middle of the afternoon, with many of the patients up and about the ward in wheelchairs, on crutches, or with the support of their shaky appendages, it was very difficult to distinguish the sheep from the goats. So the ladies had to ask any patient whose position made it impossible to tell whether he belonged to one bed or another, if he was a Protestant. If he said no, then the gift had to be withheld. The results of this discrimination were adroitly overcome by those disciples of St. Peter who had been in the hospital more than a week. Every Tuesday afternoon found those initiates conspicuously absent from the vicinity of their tell-tale cards. And if they were asked concerning their faith they found it simple to become a Protestant for just a few seconds; while the ladies, in the frenzy of their good deeds, never thought to question a Christian any further.

The sisters of the Catholic faith also were frequent visitors at the hospital. They inquired about the physical and spiritual welfare of the Romanists. One day one of them, misled no doubt by the perpetual smile of credulity that decorated my face and the absence of any revelatory card on my wheelchair, approached me, bursting with beatific appreciation. "Your smile tells me," she exclaimed, "that

you have the spirit of the Blessed Jesus." Of course, I had to plead not guilty. Whereupon she became so distressed at my degradation that she had to retire from the ward.

Her brother in the service of the Holy Church was not so easily undone. Downright flippancy in the face of the performance of his holy duties might ruffle him a little, but he stuck doggedly to his task despite all obstacles. One night, having been called at a late hour to administer the last rites to a patient of the Faith, he was sitting by the bedside of the dying man, mumbling the prayers in a tone which, though not very loud, could be heard all over the otherwise silent ward. A nearby patient, awakened by the sound, was finally provoked to complain. "How in hell do they expect any one to sleep with all this noise!" he exclaimed with exasperation. The inexorable priest interrupted his prayers. Turning to the irreverent fault-finder, he said with considerable gusto: "You shut up! This is no time for any remarks of that nature. I'm trying to save this man from Purgatory."

The various duties of the Reverend Father seemed, on many occasions, to require the most outlandish hours for their observance. At three o'clock one Christmas morning he came around the ward, ringing a bell. When he had succeeded in awakening nearly everybody, he went to the Catholic patients, administering wafers of the Holy Sacrament—to the accompaniment of more indistinguishable mumbling. One fellow, slow in awakening, presently sat up, rubbed his eyes, and tried to discern what was going on. At length he burst forth stentoriously: "This is a hell of a time to be handing out candy!" But the chaplain was not daunted.

Farther down the ward another tardy arrival from the arms of Morpheus observed the approach of the priest with

lustful anticipation. "I'm next!" he shouted as the procession reached his bed.

"Do you want the Holy Sacrament?" the Father asked solemnly.

The patient stared with surprise. "Hell, no!" he finally blurted out. "I thought you had something to eat!"

Instigated by the inspired authorities, still another surprise took place one Christmas morning. This one occurred at five o'clock. The invalids were aroused from their slumbers by the sound of singing and the noise of tramping footsteps along the corridors. Suddenly a parade of nurses, resplendent in their white uniforms and carrying candles (the hospital furnished them!) entered the ward, and marched slowly past the beds, singing carols. As the procession was leaving, an Irishman near the door was moved to articulation by the wonder of it all. "Oh, see the pretty angels!" he exclaimed with reverential approval. One of the saintly choir, whose position at the end of the line gave her words somewhat the aspect of finality, turned and hurled at him, "Say, old boy, you don't know the half of it!"

In the performance of many of his tasks about the hospital the Catholic chaplain, like his Protestant brother, was aided by a versatile assistant. The encumbent of that high office at that time had come to the hospital eight years previous as a patient. But, by the grace of God, he had become a self-respecting flunkey of the church, with powers that were almost plenary. He, also, like his Protestant equivalent, was curator of the museum of books which was maintained by philanthropic members of his faith. He functioned also as altar boy, swung the censer, reversed the chapel seats, and handed out the prayer-books. In the sanctuary of his library, which, though maintained for the

use of patients, was virtually inviolable except for his uses, he entertained the doctors, the nurses, and the Island police. There he held forth grandly, giving his guests concerts over the radio, smoking his cigar, regaling his company with stories of his operations in the stock market, and reflecting upon the marvelous fruits of the religious life.

The resident ecclesiastics were assisted in their efforts to keep the Devil out of the hospital by a pious and tenacious religionist who spent his worldly hours superintending a large office building in the Wall Street district. Sixty years old, this lay votary of evangelism had been coming over to the hospital on Thursday evenings to hold mission meetings for the last thirty-four years. Before the Queensborough Bridge was built he used to row across the river, and he missed only two Thursday evenings since he started his mission.

He frequently put on a show which kept his congregation pop-eyed. On one occasion he brought over Jack Carroll, an ex-safecracker; Mike Hickey, a former pickpocket; Pat Crowe, a quondam train robber; and a vaudeville actor who had once been a bum. With them he put on a gala performance for the thrill-hungry patients. The place was crowded and the first part of the evening was a huge success. The adventurers told their stories. The vaudevillian was the last on the program. He related the disaster that followed the taking of his first drink of liquor—related it with all the hearts-and-flowers technique which his years on the stage had given him. He told of his shameful descent to the ranks of the Bowery bums.

"One night," he cried, in a voice choking with emotion, "I was completely down and out, and had to sleep in a church graveyard . . . I was hungry and ragged. . . . I had not eaten all day. . . . An odor of beans came to me from

the kitchen of a mission across the street. . . . A girl's voice started singing a hymn. . . . Oh, but it sounded so sweet. . . . I thought of my childhood days and the religion my mother had taught me, and I finally said to myself, 'My boy, if Jesus Christ can save you now, you're going to be saved.'. . . I got up, dragged myself over to the mission doorway and started to enter. . . . The servants of Christ came and helped me in. They gave me a plate of beans and prayed for my soul. . . . Suddenly a glorious feeling of satisfaction and comfort came over my body, and I knew that I had been saved. . . . I realized then that, after all, the road of religion is the Easiest Way."

When he had finished his story there came the inevitable mention of the Blood of the Lamb, redemption, and salvation. Finally he asked for volunteers to give their hearts to Christ. The evangelist sat smugly on the platform contemplating the huge receipts in souls he was bound to bring in. A voice from the back of the hall broke the silence. "Hallelujah, give us a handout!" it sang out derisively. The irreverent heckler was asked to leave. Later I discovered that he had been a former cellmate of the vaudevillian at the penitentiary next door—in the days, of course, before the vaudevillian had discovered that religion was the Easiest Way. They had both appreciated the substantial merits of missions with kitchens attached.

At all of these Thursday night meetings a Puritan-looking lady was on hand to play the piano. Her favorite claim to distinction resided in the fact that she sang the hymn which brought the vaudevillian to the door of the Bowery mission and thus to his salvation.

Girls from the G. U. ward were once allowed to attend the sorceries of the evangelical workers, but they were not always a tractable congregation. Indeed, one evening they

started to carry on with the young fellows who sat on the opposite side of the room. They passed notes across the aisle, and even winked and giggled at the invalid Lotharios. At length, their devotion to pursuits other than theological became so distracting to the poor evangelist that he had to ask them to leave the hall. There was a shuffling and stamping of feet as they filed out. One impious hussy hung back toward the end of the line and, just as she went out the door, shouted back over her shoulder: "Aw, go to hell!" From then on a corps of women were assigned to watch over the girls at their evangelical devotions. But the G. U. ladies continued to be unmanageable, so they were finally prohibited from attending the meetings. Whereupon, and much to the consternation of the devout leader, the attendance of the young men fell off most lamentably.

Despite the heroic struggles of the clergy a disillusioned soul occasionally slipped from their clutches into the hands of the Devil. In fact, they could never be sure of even their devoutest followers. The career of one soul, his temptation, indulgence, and final fall, interested me particularly.

His name was John Francis. He came to the hospital ostensibly suffering from stomach trouble, but his real difficulty was neurasthenia. He was afraid that he was going to die, afraid of living, and dreaded to think of what was going to happen to him. They treated him for nervousness. Physically capable, he was assigned to take care of me and thus we became quite chummy. He was content to wheel me out into the hospital yard, sit by my chair all day, light my pipe, and listen to me talk whenever I felt so disposed. I sensed him as a meek, sensitive, broken-spirited creature whom life had defeated—and at the age of thirty-eight.

I decided that I might use him to read to me, inasmuch as he seemed contented in my company. I started him off

on Dreiser's "An American Tragedy," the length of which had frightened my other readers. At first it was pretty hard and slow going. The number of words which he neither knew the meaning of nor how to pronounce was rather appalling. But as we progressed he became interested and before we were through he was weeping at many of the difficulties of the chief character.

These episodes brought me to suspect that John had some rather fine sensibilities, after all. I began to draw him out concerning his life. I learned that he had come from Portugal at the age of eight to live with an aunt in California. After two years of public school he had been put to work in a fish cannery. Whenever he was caught reading, his aunt would box his ears and say: "What do you mean, trying to play the gentleman? It is work for you, and not books." He had known nothing but work ever since. He went to Mass regularly, read the tabloid newspapers and the adventure magazines—and worried about what was going to happen to him.

In the relation of his story he revealed a very deep emotionalism and an equally pious nature. As much for the purpose of observing his reactions as to fill in some of the gaps in my own reading which had been caused by my blindness, I set him to reading some of H. G. Wells' volumes to me. The operation was decidedly painful to him, but it turned out successfully. Before we had finished reading "Men Like Gods," John was seriously questioning his faith and nearly ready to forgive the obscenity of "people running around naked." My interest in him developed. His improvement was steady, but he still was loathe to go out into the cruel world again. The upshot of this difficulty was that he took a job at the hospital and continued to spend his spare time reading to me and wheeling me

around. When he got his first pay from the infirmary he went over to town to buy "some of those books" about which I had been talking to him. He came back with Walt Whitman's "Leaves of Grass," a copy of Keats, Harry Kemp's "Tramping On Life," and a pocket dictionary. I nearly fell out of my wheelchair from surprise.

Before long he had developed a great weakness for reading poetry. Thinking to season this idealistic trend of his with some alluring brand of materialism, I introduced him to Upton Sinclair. I paid dearly for that inspiration. My erstwhile peace-loving protégé became a flaming firebrand. He harangued me from morning to night about plutocrats, bourgeoisie, struggling masses, scoundrels of religion, and the prostitute press. For over two years he floated among the bizarre chimeras of American Socialism and would read nothing, willingly, which did not whoop it up for the Cause. At length, however, he came closer to earth and stuck his nose into the pages of Rabelais and Anatole France. Then he began to walk about like a normal person and even contemplated assaulting the citadels of commerce and capturing a job as salesman. He snickered a little whenever the priest walked by. And the doctors contemplated his cure with thumbs behind their suspenders and a considerable swelling of chests.

The majority of patients, of course, had none of the potentialities of John Francis. Thinking, to them, was as impossible as the realization of their wildest dreams. Addicted to religion, as is the case with most ignorant people, they denied themselves many pleasures for the sake of strengthening their chances of getting into Heaven, and then spent many hours of terrifying speculation as to their possibilities of escaping Hell.

CHAPTER XXIX

The years dragged by at City Hospital. Three years! Four years! Five years! There seemed to be no escape from the deadening monotony, from the moans of the moribunds and the stink of the wards. Occasionally it happened that I would be sleeping when the death-rattle of my neighbor would awaken the rest of the ward and cause an epidemic of cursing. At times I was thankful that I was blind, and wished during those same moments that I might also be deaf. For though it was possible to assume the rôle of spectator once in a while, to be amused and entertained as the tragedies and comedies of that stark world unfolded themselves before me day after day and year after year, there came moments when I wanted to scream that I'd had enough. The wisest reflections might banish the horror of the continual spectacle of disease and death, but they were powerless to overcome the living hell of monotony.

Even reading had begun to pall, for the quality of books which I was able to get hold of began to grow worse and worse, and the literacy of my readers, after John Francis left the hospital, became more and more doubtful. Johnny came to see me no more. His wife had divorced him and he had gone to Spain to study 'cello with Casals. Further and further I was driven again into ruminating as to what possible reason I could have for living.

Yet life had to go on whether I wished it or not.

Desperately I sought for something to hang onto, laughing bitterly at the faith I had once placed in knowledge.

Socrates, the prototype of the theoretical optimist, had said that "Knowledge is Virtue," and how significant that he came at last to acknowledge to himself that he "knew nothing." "Ah, wise Socrates!" I cried in my melancholy, "you discovered in the end that life is a cruel and futile joke!" For that, indeed, was what I had come at last to believe.

Curiously enough, having dismissed life so cynically, I felt a certain gleam of satisfaction. Ruthlessly I continued to stare clearly at the horror of it.

And then wonder of wonders! Marvel of miracles! Upon that screen of horror I—so I imagined for a moment—detected a veiled exquisite figure of seduction! My heart beat rapidly as though I were suddenly encompassed with either ecstasy or terror! In a flash I saw my life, which I had previously conceived so futile, so useless, so decrepit and full of error, now set free of its limitations, liberated from its chains, sublimely fecund because of its very tragedy, full of meaning! For I suddenly conceived my life as an art—beyond gross moralities, above social judgments of assets and liabilities, even beyond the accepted standards of physical health and muscular power. Looking so clear-sightedly at the frightful realities of blindness and immobility, surrounded by disease and death, I caught a glimpse of the imperishable illusion of Romance and experienced a sense of intoxicating delight.

Suffering no longer mattered. Suffering and joy! Exuberance and pain! Out of such leapt symphonies and cathedrals! From the grandeur of tragedy springs the sublime poetry of the world.

And in that moment of illumination I realized for the first time the supremacy of art. I saw that its true function was to give man a sense of triumph over life. For years I had been reading that great art was distilled out of imagina-

tion and adversity . . . I had been reading and reading of things that I could not understand. Suddenly, now, I understood. Art no longer appeared to me as an imitation of Nature, but the embodiment of that brave, romantic, daring determination of the soul to place something beside his experiences to assure the world and himself that he had gained ascendency over it.

And there in the abyss I discovered a reason for living. Man lives to triumph! To place the stamp of eternity upon his experiences!

That was what I must do. Even though I failed I would triumph.

THE END

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